

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 1 – Defying Dumbledore

“Good luck, Harry,” said Professor Dumbledore as Minerva McGonagall watched the baby lying outside the door of Number Four Privet Drive. The aged headmaster turned on his heel, and with a swish of his cloak, he was gone.

McGonagall knew that she was expected to leave as well. She knew she was supposed to trust Albus’ judgment, but she had watched these muggles all day, and they were the worst sort of people you could ever meet. She bent down to touch the baby’s hand one last time, and he started crying. She quickly picked him up and he stopped crying immediately. She gazed into the infant’s eyes that looked so much like his mother’s and sobbed.

“How can that man just dump James’ and Lily’s child on a doorstep like a milk bottle when he’s never even seen these people?” she muttered to herself. As images of what she’d observed coupled in her mind with what Lily had told her about her sister’s hatred of magic and refusal to acknowledge she, James, and Harry as family, Minerva came to a decision to do something she’d never done before. Defy Albus Dumbledore. She looked at Harry’s little face again and said sternly, “I will not allow that man to ruin your life!” and disappeared away as people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices: ‘To Harry Potter – the boy who lived.’

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As Minerva walked toward the house pushing a buggy she had conjured, she knew she had to act quickly if she didn’t want the Headmaster to know she’d taken the child. She’d spent the night in a muggle hotel considering her options. If she didn’t show up at Hogwarts, Albus would know she’d kidnapped Harry, and she’d be living as a fugitive. If she brought the baby to Hogwarts, Albus would find out soon enough and send Harry to the Dursleys, probably firing her in the process. She needed to find Harry an appropriate home, at least for a few years. She may eventually disguise and take him in to live with her at Hogwarts, claiming that he was her nephew or something if necessary, but not for a few years. She couldn’t give him

to a wizarding family, because they would all know who he was. She did agree that the boy didn't need to grow up famous. There was only one person she could think of. She hadn't seen him since last Christmas, nearly a year ago, but she'd always gotten along very well with him, and thought that he and his wife were wonderful people. She was very glad that the Headmaster had called off classes in honor of recent events.

She knocked on the door of Number Eight Churchill Drive wearing a plain muggle dress. The door opened, and a dark-haired woman with brown eyes, who was in her mid twenties, opened the door and smiled. She was wearing maternity clothes. She was six months pregnant and showing it very much.

"Aunt Minnie?" she exclaimed, "and a baby. Come in."

Smiling at her nephew's wife, she said, "Hello Cindy. I must say you look absolutely radiant. Is Mark here? There's something I want to talk to you two about."

Cindy grinned at Minerva. "Yeah. I'll go get him. Cute baby. Whose is he?"

Minerva sighed. "That's part of what I need to talk to you two about."

Cindy gave her Aunt-in-law a strange glance, but walked out of the room.

A few minutes later, a blonde man with blue eyes walked into the room and hugged the kidnapper. "Aunt Minnie, it's good to see you again! Are you keeping those Gryffindors out of trouble?" He continued, not really expecting an answer. "Cindy said you wanted to speak to us."

"Yes Mark. It's a long story. You may wish to sit down." Minerva looked at her brother's squib son (who'd told his muggle wife all about the magical world so that they could visit his family) and said, "I've kidnapped this child, and I want you to raise him."

"What?" exclaimed both Mark and Cindy.

"You see," said Minerva, "This is Harry Potter." She then told the quick story of how Voldemort had killed the Potters and been vanquished, and how Harry would be famous, and how Dumbledore had wanted the boy raised by, "the worst example of humanity I've ever seen. He hadn't even bothered to meet them. Just dropped him on their doorstep with a note! He may be a genius, but he hasn't got an ounce of common sense if he thinks Harry would be happily accepted into that home! Anyway, as soon as he'd left, I took Harry, and I was, er, hoping you would, well, give him a home here. I realize it might not be the perfect time with another baby on the way, but I do hope you'll consider it." She looked at them nervously with pleading eyes.

The young couple looked at Harry, Minerva, and then each other. Mark finally spoke. "Um, well, I was going to tell you at Christmas, but in January, we're moving to America for my job, so you wouldn't really be able to see him much."

Minerva smiled brightly. "That would be even better! They'd never think to look for him there!"

"Well, I think Cindy and I will have to talk this over. Why don't you watch television while we go to another room?"

"Tele-what?" asked the professor.

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After they'd set her up watching a soap opera, Mark and Cindy McGonagall walked into their bedroom and closed the door. He put his hands in his pockets and paced around for a few seconds before saying, "Well, what do you think?"

"What do you think?" she countered.

He took a deep breath. "Well, the things on the positive side are that we were planning on having more than one child anyway, and Harry does need a family. If no one has the slightest idea where he is, then he should be safe from the Death Eaters if they want revenge."

“Not to mention how cute he is, but we’d have to do something about that scar. It’s too recognizable.”

He sighed, “Which brings us to the bad points. We’d not only have to hide his scar. We’d have to disguise him in other ways. Maybe change his hair color.”

She looked sad. “You mean we’d have to keep dying his hair all the time?”

“No. I’m sure Aunt Minnie could permanently change it.”

She took a deep breath. “But don’t change the green eyes. I like them.”

“So do I,” he said smiling.

“So, are we doing this?” asked Cindy.

“If we do it, we will be kidnappers,” said Mark.

Cindy grinned. “We could just claim we found him on our doorstep the way Dumb-Old-Dork left him at the Dursleys.”

He began to smile as he considered it. “We could have Aunt Minnie change his fingerprints and stuff so that they won’t be able to identify him. Then we say we’ve grown attached to him and want to keep him. That way, we really will be his guardians.”

“What should his name be?”

He smiled at his wife. “Well, I think we could stick with the name Harry, since he probably already responds to it anyway. It is a common name that shouldn’t arouse suspicion. But I do think we should change the middle name, and of course give him our last name.”

Cindy smiled at him. “We’ll call him ‘Harry Mark McGonagall.’”

Mark then kissed his wife deeply and then excitedly said, “We’re gonna have a baby!”

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They went back to find Minerva immersed deeply in a program on the tele. When they walked in the room, Mark said, "Aunt Minnie," and she about jumped from being startled. "We've decided to adopt him. We're going to name him Harry Mark McGonagall."

The professor smiled the biggest smile of her life. "That's wonderful! Thank you!"

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After McGonagall had transfigured Harry's fingerprints, toe prints (just to be sure), and hair (to blonde), and was able to temporarily hide the scar with a glamour charm (for a few days with a promise to redo the charm whenever they needed her to until they adopted him) she accompanied them to the child welfare department, but didn't go into the office with them. She waited impatiently for over an hour until they finally walked back with Harry in Cindy's arms.

Without waiting for his aunt to speak, Mark announced, "They were happy to let us keep the child while they run the fingerprints, and told us that if they couldn't locate a relative..."

"...which they shouldn't thanks to you," interjected a grinning Cindy.

"...that there probably shouldn't be any problem with us adopting him before we leave for America."

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Over the next few months, Minerva was getting owls from her dead brother's son almost every day. She'd made it a point to only have them come when she knew she'd be alone instead of at breakfast. As promised, whenever they were going to bring Harry to any kind of official meeting, Minerva visited their house the night before and hid the scar. Mark and Cindy planned on talking to some kind of muggle doctor about hiding Harry's scar permanently when they got to America.

Albus, in the meantime, hadn't mentioned Harry, so neither did Minerva. She'd gotten a book on Occlumency the day after she kidnapped Harry and was working on it in every spare minute she could find so that Dumbledore wouldn't find out Harry's whereabouts from her.

On the same mid-December day that the horrible news of the attack on Frank and Alice Longbottom was in the Daily Prophet, Minnie got the good news that Harry had been officially adopted. He now was officially 'Harry Mark McGonagall,' and the courts decided to claim his date of birth as August 12th 1980. Minerva was impressed that the muggle doctors had guessed it within less than two weeks of his actual birth.

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She spent Christmas break at their house, and brought a ton of toys and outfits for Harry, along with some baby clothes and toys for the expected addition to the family. She also gave them a magical two-way mirror that they could use to communicate with her. She magically hid Harry's scar for the last time as Mark and his family were about to go to the airport to fly to America. As they parted, the stern teacher started crying. She knew she'd miss them all.

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Within a few months of moving to Lansing, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, where Mark worked, Harry's scar was now completely invisible, thanks to the work of a muggle doctor his adopted parents had taken him to. It was the day after McGonagall received this news that she was summoned to the headmaster's office.

She opened the door to find a very worried-looking Dumbledore, pacing the floors. "Hello Minerva, would you care for a lemon drop?" he said absently. Fawkes was nowhere to be seen.

After McGonagall shook her head and sat down, the Headmaster sat back in his chair. "I'm afraid I have terrible news, Minerva."

"Ter...Terrible news? What's happened, Albus?"

"I managed to place a squib on Privet Drive to keep watch over Harry Potter a few days ago, and she has reported that he's not there. I personally went there myself, and I discovered that they never found Harry on their doorstep."

For a moment, she thought she'd been caught, but wasn't about to make it easy for him. "They didn't find him?" she repeated, sounding and looking as distressed as she could.

Dumbledore nodded sadly, and then he looked back up at her. "Minerva, you spent the day there. Did you spot anyone unusual in the area? Someone who may have been watching us and took young Harry as soon as we left him there."

Making sure her Occlumency shields were up as strong as possible in case he probed her mind, she answered, "No Albus. I didn't notice anyone." She would've added, "except those horrible muggles you left Harry with," but didn't want to remind him that she didn't approve of the Dursleys.

He buried his face in his hands. "I fear that Death Eaters kidnapped him. Either to take revenge upon, in which case he's dead, or to raise him to follow their ways, perhaps even to be the next dark lord."

Her eyes widened in shock. "Surely you don't believe..."

"What else could have happened, Minerva? It's my fault, as Remus was gracious enough to point out to me when I informed the Order. I should have knocked on the Dursleys' door and personally handed Harry to them. That would have activated the blood wards. We hope that Harry's alive since no one has bragged about killing him, which the Death Eaters probably would do, but we just don't know. Even if he's alive, they could literally be anywhere on this planet, maybe even in a house under a Fidelius charm, by now." He half grinned at this. "They could be as close as Hogsmeade if they used that charm, and we'd never even know it." He sighed, looking older than ever before. "Well, you've listened to me ramble on long enough. You may go. If you think of anything at all, no matter how insignificant, let me know."

As Minerva left Albus' office, she felt terrible about lying to him and making him so worried, but she reminded herself that he deserved this for trying to leave Harry on a doorstep. She also reminded herself that it had been nearly five months since Harry had been left at the Dursleys, and he's finally checking on him. She knew that no residual magic would still be there by now to show she'd apparated with the baby if anyone bothered to check, so she was in the clear.

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Time passed by quickly, and before they knew it, on March 8th 1982, Harry's sister, Brianna Minerva McGonagall was born. She had brown hair and blue eyes. Aunt Minnie naturally had to spend the Easter holiday with them to meet the new addition to the family. She of course brought a ton of baby clothes with her, as well as a few presents for Harry.

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"Daddy, it mommy and Brinnie!" said little Harry excitedly as Cindy McGonagall walked into the room carrying his eight-month-old sister. Mark was sitting on the couch in the living room. Harry still had blonde hair and no scar showing.

They'd been living in America for a year, and life was good. Today, Aunt Minnie was going to floo to O'Hare airport to spend Christmas with them. The trans-continental floo network only went to international airports so muggles wouldn't get suspicious of foreigners just showing up somewhere. People who used that were even given airline tickets. They simply went into an area of the airport similar to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters and waited for their turn. Every ten minutes, the huge fireplace that fit twenty people would take everyone inside to a different airport. "Good morning, Harry," Cindy said, hugging her little boy.

"Mornin' mommy! Mornin' Brinnie!"

"Today your Aunt Minnie's coming to spend a few weeks with us."

"Yay!" the little boy said, "She bring presents!"

Mark laughed while Cindy tried to look stern. "We don't like Aunt Minnie because she gives presents. We like her because she's a nice person."

"An' give presents!" said Harry excitedly. This time even Cindy gave in to the laughter.

"We've got to go to O'Hare airport and get her," Cindy finally said.

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After a drive through terrible Chicago traffic, they finally arrived at the airport and looked around until they spotted the older woman wearing a long brown dress with a matching hat. She was pushing a trolley with several bags on it. "Aunt Minnie!" shouted Harry excitedly as he ran up to her, throwing his arms around the dignified woman's legs.

She bent down and returned the hug. "Hello Harry. It's good to see you."

"Didja bring presents?" he asked, grinning up at her with his puppy-dog eyes.

"Harry!" said Cindy as she and Mark walked up.

"Well, as a matter of fact I did, for both you and your sister," said Minerva, "but you won't get them until I've gotten a full report on your behavior from your parents."

"I been good, ain't I mommy!"

Cindy smiled for about thirty seconds as her little boy awaited her assessment. "I suppose so."

Minerva hugged both Cindy and Mark, who embarrassed his aunt by kissing her on the cheek. "Mark, stop it."

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True to her word, Aunt Minnie gave both Harry and Brianna one present each when they got home. Brianna's was a soft stuffed

Hippogriff and Harry's was a working miniature train that was a replica of the Hogwarts Express. She told Harry's parents that she'd transfigured the train from rocks. They decided not to tell Harry about magic until he had his first accidental bout of it. He knew that Aunt Minnie taught at a school called Hogwarts that he'd go to someday, but had no idea of it being magical.

She was saving the rest of the gifts for Christmas day. Mark and Cindy found it funny the way the kids had their Great Aunt wrapped around their fingers. They had her doing things that people from Hogwarts would have never believed, such as playing hide-and-go-seek and tag. They even got her to play the 'tickle monster.' They greatly enjoyed Christmas where they were showered with gifts, and most importantly love.

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Harry started kindergarten at five years old, and it wasn't long before he had his first experience with accidental magic. He'd made friends the first day with a kid named Matthew Burke, but they quickly made an enemy out of a bigger kid named Brian Popovich. He'd made fun of Harry because he needed glasses, so he and Matt decided to prank him. Brian was sitting down on a chair when Matt 'accidentally' spilled his drink, orange soda, on the floor in front of Brian. Harry was on the floor tying Brian's shoes together. While Harry was tying them, Brian noticed and grabbed Harry's hand and started squeezing it as hard as he could. Harry was scared that his hand would be broke, and all of the sudden Brian's hand started to hurt so he let go. Forgetting that his shoes were tied together, he got up and fell, landing face-down in the puddle of soda.

Unfortunately for Harry, the teacher had seen part of it, so Harry was in trouble. After school, while Harry was being grounded as his sister enjoyed the story, there was a knock at the door. Mark answered it.

A short, thin middle-aged man with black hair that was starting to turn gray was standing at the door wearing a gray suit. "Hello. Mr. McGonagall, I presume?"

"Yes."

The stranger extended his hand and Mark shook it. "I'm Stephen Kirk. May I come in for a few minutes? It has to do with your son and what happened at school today."

He sighed, hoping the other kid's parents weren't suing or something stupid like that. "Come in."

Once they were settled down in the living room, and Cindy had gotten them some tea,

Stephen said, "To put it simply, your son performed accidental magic today, which means he is a wizard." He paused, as though expecting an argument.

Cindy smiled. "Well that explains it. We were wondering if he were a wizard or not."

Mr. Kirk seemed surprised. "You...you know about magic."

Mark smiled. "Oh yes. You see, I'm a squib from England. In fact, my aunt is the Deputy Headmistress at Hogwarts. I guess Harry will be going there when he's old enough."

"Really?" said the man happily. "If your aunt teaches there, I suppose there wouldn't be much point in trying to persuade you to send Harry anyplace else when he's eleven."

He chuckled. "I'm afraid not. If I sent Harry to any other school, she'd never speak to me again."

"If you're from England, than I assume you've heard of the restriction for underage magic they have over there."

"Yes," he said, nodding.

"We in America think that's rubbish. All we worry about is secrecy. As long as he doesn't perform the magic around muggles, we don't care. While we do have boarding schools like Hogwarts that start at age eleven, we also have schools where wizarding children are taught basic magic, as well as the foundations of many of the courses taught at Hogwarts. They meet from five to six p.m. on Monday through

Friday, and on Saturday seven-thirty a.m. to twelve-thirty p.m. Each weekday is a different subject, and Saturday is all five subjects.”

“The first year classes are Latin, which is helpful in learning spells; basic wand handling, which includes safety and all the different wand movements; simple charms, simple transfiguration, and simple herbology. Some of them continue while others, such as wand handling, are replaced by classes such as potions, and eventually defense, although we wait until the children are ten to start that. If you started him now, he’d be well ahead in his classes, and might even be able to skip a grade at Hogwarts. Instead of going by ages, we start kids when they perform their first accidental magic. We find that teaching to control magic then helps prevent more accidents. Our first term starts two weeks after muggle terms, because starting school tends to cause accidental magic. Therefore by waiting those two weeks, we almost double our enrollment.”

“Well,” said Mark, looking at his wife, “What do you think?”

“It sounds good, but maybe we should ask Harry what he thinks.”

“We should probably ask Aunt Minnie’s opinion too. Mr. Kirk, could we get back to you?”

“Of course,” he said with a smile. “I know that’s a big decision. Here are some forms to look at,” he said, pulling out his wand and conjuring a brochure, along with legal-looking papers. “Just let us know by the end of the week. I’ve also left instructions to the nearest wizarding neighborhood where you can buy wands and books, and anything else magical you’d like whether you choose to put Harry in Wentworth Witchcraft Elementary School or not.”

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That night, they talked to Minerva over the two-way mirror, who seemed very pleased about it. She was unaware of the differences in American wizarding laws. She’d always assumed underage restrictions were the same everywhere. She was all for it, so they just needed to talk to Harry.

“Well Harry,” said Mark nervously, “Do you remember how that boy Brian’s hand was hurting for apparently no reason?”

“Uh-huh,” said Harry, looking down like he expected to be in more trouble.

“You did it,” said Cindy.

“No I didn’ mommy! I don’ know how!”

“We know you didn’t do it on purpose,” said Mark. “You did magic.”

“I did?” he asked, amazed. “How? Can you do magic?”

“I can’t, but your Aunt Minnie can.”

Harry looked excited. “She can?”

“Yes. Hogwarts is a magic school that you’ll go to when you’re eleven.”

His eyes were wide. “Really? Can I see it now?”

Mark chuckled. “Not for a while, but you’re learning to read. When you’re ready, you can read a book about it that Aunt Minnie gave us. It’s called ‘Hogwarts, A History.’ Cindy rolled her eyes, knowing it would be years before Harry could read that tome.

“Can ya read it ta me tonight?” he asked pleadingly.

“Maybe,” Mark said, “But for now, I have a question. Do you want to start learning magic now?”

“Yeah,” said the smiling boy.

“If you do, it means more school,” said Cindy.

“But it magic school!” said Harry.

“Then you’ll start in a week,” said Mark. “Saturday, we’ll get you a wand and other school supplies.”

“Yay!” he said raising his fists in air, victoriously.

“Oh, one important thing. You can’t tell anyone about being magical or learning magic. That’s very important. If you do, you’ll be in a lot of trouble.”

“Ok, it secret,” said Harry.

“Yes,” said Cindy, “It’s a secret.”

“Is Brianna magic too?” asked Harry.

“We don’t know yet,” said Mark.

“You gotz ta wait til she ax dental magix someone like I done!” he said grinning.

Cindy giggled. “Yes dear, we’ve got to wait to see if she does accidental magic.”

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Harry and Brianna (who they told since it wouldn’t stay a secret in the house very long anyway – but she knew it was a secret she couldn’t tell anyone) were fascinated by Little Salem, the local wizarding neighborhood about the size of Diagon Alley. This one was entered through an arcade. There was a game called ‘Witch’s War.’ in a corner that was marked, ‘Out of Order.’ If you sat in it and leaned into the wall it was against, you’d fall through it, but land on your feet in an area unlike anything Harry had ever seen before. He was the first to bravely try, followed by Mark, Brianna, and Cindy.

They all looked around, intrigued by the names on the shops, such as ‘Calumet Cauldrons,’ as well as all the different types of creatures walking around. Mark chuckled when he noticed a restaurant called ‘Magical McDonalds.’ They soon saw a goblin walking out of there toward the local branch of Gringotts, which was going to be their first stop until Cindy noticed a Gringotts ATM machine by the entrance. You’d use your debit card from a muggle bank, and it would give you wizarding money (after charging a dollar fee). They took out enough

for Harry's books and wand, along with plenty for anything else they might want to buy.

After they got the books and supplies, they walked into a 'Wand Locker' Outlet, which was apparently part of a popular American chain of wand shops. They were surprised to find a young woman behind the counter. Harry blushed when he saw the attractive blonde woman who was in her early twenties. Brianna noticed and giggled until he elbowed her.

The woman was very worried as wand after wand rejected Harry, who was getting more and more embarrassed, until finally she handed him a wand made of Beechwood and phoenix feather, nine inches. A few red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework when he held it. She said uncertainly, "This doesn't seem to be a perfect match, but it looks like it will work. You may want to try another shop, but the nearest one is in Michigan."

Mark smiled. "I think we'll take this one," he said while wondering if the perfect wand for Harry might be in England.

"Well," the woman said, "We normally charge seven Galleons, but I'll let you have it for six Galleons since it's not a perfect match to this young man's exquisite taste." She winked at Harry, who blushed and hid his face.

"Thank you very much," said Cindy, smiling.

As soon as they left, Brianna started giggling madly and shouted, "Harry gots a crush on da lady in der!" repeatedly until Mark caught Harry's fist that was about to punch his sister. Harry's face was completely red.

"Brianna, stop teasing your brother!" said Cindy, "and Harry, don't try to hit your sister!"

"Fine!" the siblings said together with their arms crossed over their chests and matching angry expressions on their faces.

Mark then smirked at his son. "Is that true that you liked the lady in there?" which caused Brianna to laugh so hard she fell as Harry hid his purple face in his hands while Cindy glared at her husband.

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Harry did pretty well in his new classes. He hated the Latin (which was currently concentrating on the alphabet) and herbology, but enjoyed charms, wand handling, and transfiguration. Brianna was easily impressed when Harry did his homework in front of her, magically sharpening his pencil. Mark (and Aunt Minnie when he told her) was surprised to find that Harry's school used regular paper and pencils and didn't require wizard robes. The pamphlet they'd read pointed out the fact that these peculiarities often alerted muggles that something was unusual. Besides, paper and pencils are easier to handle than parchment, quill, and ink, especially for younger children. When the kids are older they start using pens as well.

Harry tended to be at the top of his class at Wentworth Wizarding School while average at his regular classes. When his parents confronted him about it he said, "Magic more intrstin' an' I be goin' Hogwarts anyway."

"Until then you'll be going to muggle school and you'll get your grades back up unless you want us to pull you out of magic school," said Mark, bluffing. He knew he'd never pull Harry out of magic school. After all, that's the world he belonged in. He did however know that Harry would need reading, writing, and arithmetic even in the wizarding world.

"No! Ya can't take me outta magic school! I run 'way if ya do!"

Mark grinned at the panic he saw in Harry's eyes. Cindy said, "Then pick up your other grades to prove we don't need to."

"Fine!" he said.

"Don't take that attitude with me, young man!" she said.

"Sorry, mommy," said Harry, looking at her with his best pathetic puppy dog face.

She sighed and patted his blonde head while smiling. "Why don't you run along and work on your reading?" He walked to his room without another word.

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Harry's muggle grades did improve after that, although he did require occasional encouragement in the form of threats and/or bribery. During the spring of Harry's second year, a few weeks after Brianna's fifth birthday, she did something she shouldn't have done. She wanted to try doing magic, so she borrowed Harry's wand without telling him when he'd left his room for a few minutes in the middle of doing homework. When he returned, he saw that his wand wasn't where he'd left it, so he immediately got mad and went straight to his sister's bedroom. When he quietly opened the door without knocking, he found her pointing his wand at a pencil, trying to sharpen it. She was so absorbed in her task that she hadn't noticed him yet.

"GIVE IT BACK!" he shouted, scaring her and causing a red light to shoot out of the wand that she'd instinctively pointed at the source of the noise. The blast hit Harry square in the chest, causing him to go unconscious and fall to the floor, just as Cindy and Mark approached the room to see what the noise was.

As Harry collapsed, tears started falling from Brianna's horrified face. She dropped the wand and ran toward her brother. "Harry! I SORRY!" she shouted as she took him in her arms in time to see her parents, who did not look happy at all. She started trembling, afraid she'd hurt Harry badly or even killed him. "I...sorry....I take wand....H-Harry surprise me." At this point she couldn't even speak anymore. She just sobbed for a few minutes on Harry's unconscious form, leaning her head on his chest. Her parents watched, not sure what to say. Mark bent down and checked Harry's pulse, smiling slightly when he felt one. "Harry...Harry gonna be ok, right daddy?" Brianna finally said through her tears.

"I think so," Mark said, "I'm gonna call the department of accidental magic though, just to be sure."

"I'll do it," said Cindy.

As she walked toward their bedroom to retrieve the 'other' phonebook, Brianna sobbed, "I sorry daddy. Is I goin' to jail? I didn' mean it! He, he scare me..."

He gave his daughter a hug. "I know honey, and I love you, but I can't simply overlook the fact that you took your brother's wand. You will be punished after we find out how Harry is doing."

"Yes daddy," she said with her head bowed low in penitence. "I love you, too, an' Harry. If anythin' wrong I don' know..."

"We'll find that out now," said a friendly-looking man with dark hair and a graying beard. He was standing with Cindy. "I guess I should introduce myself. My name is Oliver Brown. I'm from the accidental magic department. We can apparate directly to the other side of a phone call. I take it that this pretty little girl here is the one who performed the magic on the boy."

"Yes," said Mark, moving with Brianna to give the wizard room to examine Harry.

"I doubt she's hurt her brother seriously," he said as he bent down. He pulled out his wand and performed a spell on Harry. He then chuckled as he saw the results written in shining letters in front of him. "How old is your daughter?"

"Brianna's five years old," said Cindy.

"Amazing. She's performed a perfect stunning spell on your son. I'd hate to duel her when she gets older. She's going to be a very powerful witch." He then turned his wand toward Harry. "Enervate."

Harry opened his eyes and saw a stranger smiling at him. He flinched and then noticed his parents there too, and he remembered what had happened, all the way to the point of the spell hitting him. "BRIANNA! I'm gonna kill you!" he shouted as he got up.

"Now, Harry..." said Cindy.

Brianna in the meantime had gotten to a far corner of her room. "I sorry! I didn' mean it!"

“Well,” said Mr. Brown with a grin, “Since Harry’s already going to magic school, you should have no trouble enrolling Brianna there as well. It appears you have a family crisis to deal with. I’ll see myself off, and you’ll get a bill in a few days. Bye.” He then disappeared with a soft pop.

Harry started to run toward his sister, but found the strong arms of his father were holding him back. “She stole my wand and hexed me!”

“We know,” said Mark, “and she’ll be punished. But hexing you was an accident.”

“No it wasn’t! I hate her!” he shouted and ran off to his room.

“Harry!” shouted Brianna, “It was accident! I not want hurt...” Harry’s door slammed shut and Brianna sat down in the corner where she’d been standing, and cried with her face in her knees.

“I’m sure he didn’t mean it sweetheart,” said Cindy, walking up to her daughter.

“Yes he did! I was bad and now he hate me!” she said between her tears.

“I’m gonna go talk to him,” said Cindy, “while I think about your punishment.”

“I do Harry’s chores for a year,” Brianna declared, causing Mark to chuckle.

“Well,” said Cindy, “I’m not sure about a year, but...”

“Two year!” cried Brianna, “Maybe he forgive me then.”

“I meant that one year might be too long, Brianna. Your father and I will discuss it and let you know our decision.” Cindy then picked up Harry’s wand from the floor and left the room.

-

Harry sat on his bed fuming. He knew his sister could use her sad puppy-dog eyes, which she did even better than him, to get out of any punishment. She'd gone into his room, taken his wand, and hexed him. He admitted to himself that it had to have been an accident since she didn't know any spells, but she shouldn't have had the wand to begin with. He was interrupted from his thoughts by a knock at his door. He ignored it, knowing it would either be Brianna or one of his parents telling him to forgive Brianna. His door opened.

"Hi Harry," said his mom. "I brought you your wand back." She closed the door as she entered.

"Put it on my desk, where I left it," he said coldly.

"Do you know exactly what Brianna did to you?" she said, sitting on the chair by Harry's desk.

"She hexed me," Harry said, "On purpose no matter what she says!"

"I meant what spell she used."

His expression softened. "No, but it's like I fainted."

"Exactly. It's called the stunning spell. Have they taught it to you yet at school?"

He put his head down. "No."

Cindy wore a fake worried expression. She looked around as though to make sure no one was listening in. "I think she's been running off and learning dark magic so she can hex us all."

Harry's expression changed from angry to surprised. "What?"

"You were right to tell her you hate her. I think I'll tell her that too."

"Huh?"

"Your father thinks we should get her a wand and enroll her at your school, but I know better."

"Y-you do?" Harry was getting worried about his mom's sanity.

“Of course. Look at what she did with your wand. We’re just lucky she was still practicing. I’m sure she really wanted to kill you, and then everybody else.”

“Um...mom?”

“I think we should kick her out of the house now before she’s too powerful. What do you think? Do you want to hex her a few times first?”

Harry was now clearly scared, and his mom was having a very hard time keeping a straight face. “I, I don’t think she’s doing that. I, it was an accident. She wasn’t trying to hurt me.”

“But she took your wand. It must have been her plan all along.”

“She was, was just curious. She wanted to know if she had magic. You can’t kick her out for that.”

“Why are you trying to defend her? You said you hate her.”

As his mom’s expression changed from fear to amusement to neutral, his face fell. “I did say that, didn’t I?”

“Yes you did, and she’s right now in her room crying. I’ve never seen anyone as scared or sorry as she was when you fell down. She thinks she should do your chores for two years, and then maybe you’ll forgive her. What do you think?”

He smirked. “Well, two years without chores...”

“Harry!”

“Alright, alright. I’ll talk to her. But she did take my wand!”

“I know Harry, and your dad and I will punish her for that, but I think that she needs to know you still love her...”

“Mom!”

“I know you boys don’t like this kind of mushy stuff, but you know that you love your sister, and she needs to know that too! If you can say

that you hate her, you can say that you love her!" She took a deep breath. "She really looks up to you, and it really hurts her when you say things like that. You've got to learn not to say things you don't mean when you're angry. You can ruin a friendship that way."

"I already said I'll talk to her, mom." She then hugged her son.

"I knew you would."

-

Brianna was sitting in her room alone, still crying in a corner. The door was open because she didn't bother to get up and close it. This should've been a happy day. She found out she was a witch. Unfortunately her very first accidental magic had hurt her brother, and now he hated her. She looked up when she heard her door close.

Harry was standing there looking nervous. "Hi, Brianna."

"I sooo sorry, Harry! I never do magic again!"

"What kind of rubbish is that? Of course you'll do magic. You'll be going to my school. You'll probably do better than me, judging by that spell you accidentally sent at me," he said with a smirk.

She smiled a bit when he admitted it was an accident. He walked up to her and squatted down. "I'm still not happy that you took my wand..."

"I sorry!"

"Let me finish. I know you wouldn't really try to hurt me." He took a deep breath. "I said some mean things to you. I didn't mean them either."

"You didn't?" she asked, finally daring to hope he didn't hate her.

"No. I don't hate you sis. I...um...love you." He then hugged her and she returned the embrace, crying on his shoulder.

"I was so scared," she said, "I so glad you ok."

-

Brianna ended up doing Harry's chores for a week. Their parents felt bad about punishing the girl after she'd been through so much, but they felt that a lack of punishment would encourage more rule-breaking. Aunt Minnie was thrilled to find out that Brianna was magical. They went to Little Salem that weekend and got Brianna her own wand (mahogany and dragon heartstring, 8 ½ inches) at the same shop from the same woman Harry "DID NOT" have a crush on. This wand was a perfect match for Brianna. She borrowed her brother's first magic books and got her mom to help her read them. Cindy had begun teaching both of her kids to read when they turned three, but Brianna wasn't quite ready to read books like that on her own.

The summer came and went, with Brianna practicing her reading and spellwork in anticipation of attending Wentworth Witchcraft Elementary School. She also began kindergarten that year as well. She turned out to be somewhat of a bookworm, and was at the top of her classes in both muggle and magical school. She did gain a few friends and went to some sleepovers. Harry wasn't happy when his sister invited her friends to sleepover at their house, and managed to arrange to spend the night at one of his friend's houses whenever the girls were staying at his house.

The McGonagalls got a Nintendo Entertainment System that included Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt the summer that Harry turned ten (Brianna was eight). Both siblings greatly enjoyed that, and were known to spend hours in the living room fighting Bowser and his allies to save Princess Toadstool. Harry enjoyed Duck Hunt a lot more than his sister, and would wait until one of his friends, either magical or muggle, would come over so he could compete with them.

That was the same year that he learned both defensive spells (he finally learned how to stun Brianna and told her so, causing her to pale) and modern magical history, which included a recent war in Europe fought over ridiculous prejudices. This particular war had been started by a dark wizard named Voldemort (Americans didn't fear the name) and was ended by a boy named Harry Potter. No one knows what happened to the boy, who disappeared the day after

Voldemort did. Some said he was killed by the same Death Eaters who tortured aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom into insanity. Others think he's alive and being trained as a dark wizard to take Voldemort's place. Still others simply think that someone hid him away in a good home where nobody knew who he was so that he'd be safe. The point was that no one knew what had become of him, except that his name was still down in the registry of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which indicated that he wasn't dead.

Harry came home after the lesson on the demise of Voldemort excited to talk about it with his parents. He didn't know why, but the whole story of Voldemort seemed very interesting to him. "Hi mom!" he said after the 'Eagle Bus' took him and Brianna home from school. Once Harry had turned ten, his parents let him and Brianna take the magical bus to and from wizarding school on Saturdays. It went incredibly fast like a roller coaster, but had seatbelts so that you weren't thrown around when it made sharp turns or stopped. Their house was on the floo network, but both Harry and Brianna greatly enjoyed riding the bus, so their parents allowed it, figuring that it meant they didn't have to visit Six Flags Great America nearly as often, although they did end up going at least twice every summer – once with Mark's company before the park was open to the public (before the new rides were open), and once in August.

"Hi Harry, Brianna!" said Cindy, "How was school?"

"It was great! I learned a spell that will freeze a person until they get revived in Defense class, and about Voldemort and Harry Potter in History class!"

Cindy froze for a moment when Harry mentioned his true identity. She then decided to change the topic. "What about potions, transfiguration, and herbology?"

"They were fine too, but this kid Harry Potter, who would be my age, he somehow killed the most powerful dark wizard alive nine years ago, and ended a war! But then he disappeared."

"Did he?" asked a frightened Cindy who wasn't sure what to do.

“Yeah. Some say he’s being taught to be a dark wizard. I hope they’re wrong.”

“I’m sure they are,” said Cindy.

“I wonder if Aunt Minnie knew the Potters,” said Brianna, who’d heard the whole story while they were riding home. “Harry said her boss, Professor Dumbledore, did.”

“I, er, am sure she did. They, er, probably were her students at one time.”

“Oh yeah,” said Brianna.

At that moment Mark walked in the house behind them. He’d had to work that Saturday.

“Maybe I can ask Aunt Minnie about Harry Potter to help with my report,” said Harry.

Mark coughed behind them at the mention of that name. “H-Harry P-Potter?”

“Yeah. Did Aunt Minnie tell you anything about him? He went missing just a few months before we left England.”

Mark and Cindy looked at each other. Cindy nodded and then so did Mark. “Kids, sit down and we’ll tell you everything we know about Harry Potter.”

Harry smiled broadly. “So she did tell you something about him! I knew it!”

Cindy said, “Yes. The day after his parents died, she brought him to our house and asked us to raise him as our son.”

Harry frowned. “And you said no? Why? I guess you were already planning on moving and had me. Did I play with him while he was visiting?”

Mark continued, "I, I think you're missing the point." He took a deep breath and looked at his son. "You are Harry Potter. This is a complete secret and you can't tell anyone. Aunt Minnie transfigured your hair blonde and we had a doctor remove your scar. Your fingerprints were changed as well, but we kept your eyes the same color."

Brianna was staring at her brother, who was looking astounded. "I, I'm not your son?" He looked at Brianna. "I, I'm not your brother?"

"You are as much a part of this family as any of us!" said Cindy sternly, "And we love you every bit as much as Brianna!"

Harry seemed to relax a bit, but he was still in shock. "I, I, Ok, they wanted to keep where I am a secret so no one could get revenge. I, I guess I understand. I suppose as a kid I could've blabbed it. So Dumbledore lied when he said I disappeared to throw the Death Eaters off the track."

Mark answered. "No. He dropped you off at your only living relatives' house like a milk bottle. Aunt Minnie had watched them all day and saw that they were the worst kind of people you could imagine, and she remembered terrible things Lily Potter had said about them. That Dumb-Old-Dork didn't bother trying to meet them. He simply went to the house and left you on the doorstep with a note. Five months later he checked on you to find you were missing."

Cindy continued, "She took you as soon as he left. She would've raised you herself, but she knew that Dumbledore would've found out and put you with those people. So she had to find someone to take care of you."

"You," said Harry.

"Yes," said Mark. "She brought you to us and we happily welcomed you to our family. We claimed you'd been dropped on our doorstep and we had no idea who you were, and adopted you. Dumbledore has no idea. When you go to Hogwarts, you need to try to keep that secret. First because I don't think you want everybody staring at you like an exhibit from the zoo. Secondly, because it could get your Aunt

Minnie, maybe even us, in trouble. Thirdly, Dumbledore will probably want to send you to those people.”

“I understand,” said Harry. “I won’t tell anyone.”

Mark smiled. “I know, but there are magical ways to find out anyway.”

“One of my teachers mentioned Leg-legillmonky.”

Mark chuckled. “Legilimency. What do you know about it?”

“That it requires eye contact, so I shouldn’t look him in the eyes.”

Cindy continued, “Or another Professor named Snape. He’s also a Legilimens. But there is a defense against it called Occlumency. Aunt Minnie learned it right after she, well, kidnapped you so that she wouldn’t be found out. She gave us a book on it. It seems even muggles can learn to protect their minds. She sent us the book once we came into contact with the wizarding world.”

“When I started magic school,” stated Harry.

“Exactly. We’d like you two to read it and start learning. It’s more important for Harry to learn it first since he’s going to Hogwarts, but you both should learn it. Your magic school has a strict policy against reading the minds of students, but if you ever feel that one of your teachers is looking straight into your soul, break eye contact immediately.”

“Alright,” both kids replied.

“By the way, we’re going to be spending the summer in England with Aunt Minnie,” said Mark.

“Yes...No!” said Brianna. “We won’t be able to practice magic there.”

Minerva had explained that the ministry didn’t detect underage magic in wizarding homes, but had also sworn them to secrecy about that fact, giving them a story to tell the kids. Mark said, “Don’t tell anyone, but because you’re from America, you’re allowed to do magic in Aunt Minnie’s house as long as no one but family is there.”

Cindy continued, "She does want you to meet other kids though. The muggleborn students are going to have an orientation at her house a few days after we arrive. She wants both of you there as well since we're muggles, although technically your dad is a squib."

"Why me?" asked Brianna, "I won't be going to Hogwarts until Harry's third year."

"She thinks you'd be rather bored otherwise, and that you may enjoy meeting some children, even if they are Harry's age," answered Cindy.

Harry then got an angry look on his face. "Voldemort murdered my real parents!"

"Yes," said Mark, "but I doubt it'll help for you to be angry at someone you somehow already got rid of."

"I guess not." Harry then smiled. "So, does my true identity mean I can get my presents on July 31st instead of August 12th this year?"

"I'm afraid that would blow your cover," said Brianna with a smirk.

"Besides, Aunt Minnie intended on inviting any of the muggleborn students you liked to a birthday party on August 12th, but if you don't want one, that's fine," said Mark.

"No, that's fine. I can keep my birthday as it is."

-

The months passed quickly, and at the end of the school year, Harry bid goodbye to his friends, telling the muggle friends he'd be attending a private school in Scotland, while telling his wizarding friends he was going to Hogwarts.

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Minerva was getting nervous as she waited for her family to arrive. She'd entered both Harry and Brianna McGonagall's names on the list at Hogwarts when they'd performed their first accidental magic,

and had casually 'let it slip' that her nephew had magical kids who would be attending so that it wouldn't come as a surprise that the headmaster would investigate. She was also glad that Harry already knew who he was, and was also glad he was keeping it secret. She was proud of how quickly they'd devoured the Occlumency book and how much effort they'd put into learning it, but she knew she'd have to actually test their shields to find out how well they were doing. It was imperative that Harry be a master Occlumens as soon as possible, preferably before his first class with Snape.

That was another thing Albus did that she didn't understand. Ever since he'd hired that insufferable git (not that she'd actually call him that) his absolutely blatant favoritism of the Slytherins made a complete mockery of the point system. Breathing seemed to be Snape's main reason for taking points from Gryffindors and adding points to Slytherins. According to the school records, the man had never taken a point from a Slytherin or given a point to a Gryffindor in the ten or so years he'd been working there. She pointed out all these facts, along with accounts from dozens of witnesses from every house but Slytherin, and Albus completely ignored it, saying that he trusted Snape. She'd even shown him pensieve memories from students that proved Snape didn't even teach. He simply put instructions on the board and started taking points from Gryffindors. For that reason, no house but Slytherin had won the House Cup since he'd become the head of Slytherin house.

She honestly wondered what was wrong with the headmaster. Ever since she'd realized how foolish Albus had been regarding Harry, she'd started questioning many of the decisions he'd made. For example, he'd hired a complete fraud who enjoyed predicting student deaths as Divination teacher at about the same time he'd hired Snape. Now he'd just asked her to help him set up protections to guard the Philosopher's Stone at Hogwarts. Why would a school be used to guard anything but children? What if some dark wizard came to the school looking for the stone? He might kill every student he sees along the way before he gets to the obstacles protecting the stone. What if a student, accidentally or purposely, came across Hagrid's three-headed dog?

She had slowly begun to believe that Albus Dumbledore wasn't actually that good of a headmaster. He seemed to have his own agenda that superseded his responsibility to the students – to provide a high quality education in a safe environment conducive to learning. She knew he wasn't a dark wizard, and that he probably had the best intentions, with what he felt was the greater good at heart, but hiring bad teachers and making Hogwarts more dangerous shouldn't have been an option. He quite obviously didn't have the students' best interests at heart. She sighed, figuring that there was nothing she could do about it anyway and continued waiting for her family at the airport.

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"Aunt Minnie!" shouted Harry and Brianna happily as they ran toward Professor McGonagall with outstretched arms.

"Harry! Brianna!" she said as they each in turn embraced her. "Mark and Cindy, it's good to see you as well!"

"I'm just glad my job let me have this long of a vacation!"

"So am I!" said Minnie. "We'll all have to take the Knight Bus to my house and discuss a few issues that I'm concerned about."

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After a ride wherein everyone was tossed around the bus, Cindy McGonagall walked up to Stan Shunpike and shouted, "WHY THE HELL DON'T YOU HAVE SEATBELTS!?! THE BUS LIKE THIS IN AMERICA DOES! They realize that passengers probably don't want to be tossed all over the bus during the ride! My kids probably have brand new bumps and bruises thanks to you!"

Stan stared at her. "I'm sorry we have offended you ma'am. What's a seatbelt?"

After she very patiently cured the ignorance of the Knight Bus conductor, he said, "Wow! That's a great idea. Did you hear that Ernie?"

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Once they were settled in McGonagall Manor (thanks to the help of a house elf named Blinky – much to the annoyance of the Americanized and anti-slavery McGonagalls), which was located in Scotland, Minerva sat in the living room with her guests. “Well since I’m the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts who writes the Hogwarts letters, I already have Harry McGonagall’s ready. Professor Dumbledore has asked me to send one to Harry Potter on his birthday as well. I shall have to dissemble yet again and claim that it was returned unopened. I just hope he doesn’t ask me to keep trying.”

“That would be funny,” said Harry, “To send a whole flock of owls after me.” Brianna laughed.

“That reminds me. Do you have an owl?” asked Minerva.

“No. My American friends all had telephones, even the wizarding ones.”

“I’d like to get you one so that you can keep in contact with the friends you make here. Just remember not to try sending it across the ocean to your family over the school year. To talk to them, I’ll get you your own mirror.”

His face lit up from that news. “Thanks Aunt Minnie!”

Brianna frowned for a few seconds but said nothing.

Minnie said, “I’ll also be getting a mirror for you, Brianna. I’d imagine that you may wish to speak to your brother without your parents listening in. Would you like an owl now or when you start at Hogwarts?”

The eight year old girl smiled brightly. “Now, please.”

“Having a pet is a responsibility, both of you,” said Cindy, “You’ll have to take care of them.”

“Yes mom,” they both said together.

Minerva looked at Harry. "Now, as I understand it, when you got your wand, you were told that it wasn't a perfect match."

"Yes, but it's worked so far," he said defensively.

"I'm sure that it's a fine wand, but you'll get the best results with the wand that suits you best. I have a suspicion I've never voiced that the wand meant for a witch or wizard always somehow makes its way to the wand shop closest to where that person was born. In Brianna's case, it was Little Salem, but in your case, it would be Ollivander's shop in Diagon Alley. I would like to visit there tomorrow when we pick up Harry's school supplies."

"We're going there tomorrow?" asked Mark.

"Yes," Minerva said simply, "and while we're there, I'd like to resolve another issue. I know that James and Lily Potter left an inheritance for their son at Gringotts, though I'm not entirely sure what it consists of. The goblins there are very discrete. They don't normally disclose any information about the activity of accounts or who visits Gringotts. You can even ask them to be even more discreet than usual. Er, just remember to be polite."

"Are you asking us to take Harry to Gringotts claiming his real identity?" asked Mark.

"Yes," said Minerva, earning surprised looks all around. "Not publicly. Simply ask for a private meeting when you arrive and tell the goblin you speak to that this is confidential, and that Harry is indeed Harry Potter."

"And they'll believe us?" asked Cindy skeptically.

"Of course not, but they'll take a small sample of his blood."

"They're gonna stick me with a needle? No way!"

"Actually they'll prick your finger with a knife, but heal it once they get the blood. They'll then be able to create a new key to your vault, and at the same time the existing key will disappear, right out of Albus' safe." She smiled briefly. "He will eventually notice that the key

disappeared and will probably ask the goblins if they made a new key for your vault. You should specifically say you don't want Professor Dumbledore to know about it. Fortunately, his form of Legilimency doesn't work on goblins, only humans." She then looked at her niece and nephew. "Have you been practicing your Occlumency?"

"Yes, Aunt Minnie," said Harry, putting up his shields as his sister did the same. He soon felt a pressure move against his shields. At first it was gentle, and then it got gradually stronger as he kept her out. Finally she dropped the attack for a moment and Harry relaxed, only to be attacked at this momentary weakness. He soon found himself reliving some of the most wonderful moments of his life – birthday parties, Christmas mornings, the first time he saw his sister, and when he learned he was magical.

"You did very well Harry, except that you relaxed too soon. Truthfully, unless you give them reason to suspect you, that's the strongest attack you'll get. But if they do become suspicious, they'll attack much harder than that, especially Snape. We'll need to work on this every day this summer, and into the school year, as necessary."

"Yes Aunt Minnie."

"Now I'll test Brianna's defenses."

Brianna turned out to be a bit easier to read than Harry, and also agreed to work on it that summer, and then to continue working on it after they left so that hopefully the next time they saw each other, Aunt Minnie wouldn't be able to read her mind.

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The first stop they made was at Gringotts. Minerva did not accompany them inside the bank out of fear of being recognized. Mark walked up to the teller. "Excuse me. My family and I would like to talk with someone who can handle accounts in private."

"Yes sir," said the goblin. "Wait in that room." He pointed at an open door on the other side of the room. They walked into the room that had a rectangular table with six uncomfortable wooden chairs around it. They all sat down and waited.

After fifteen minutes, a goblin walked in. "Hello. My name is Griphook. May I ask your identities?"

"My name is Mark McGonagall."

"Are you of any relation to Minerva McGonagall?"

"Yes. She's my aunt. This is my wife Cindy and my daughter Brianna. The boy's identity is to be a complete secret from everybody, including Albus Dumbledore. Will you agree to that?"

"Yes of course. We here at Gringotts are most discreet. Who is the boy?"

"This is my adopted son, Harry Potter. He would like to find out what inheritance he has coming."

The goblins eyes flicked up to where the scar should be.

"We had his scar hidden through a muggle operation, for obvious reasons. His hair and fingerprints have also been altered. The name he goes by is Harry Mark McGonagall."

"We will have to take some of his blood to prove your claim. May I assume that you do not possess his vault key?"

"That's correct," Harry said as he held out his hand, closing his eyes tightly. His sister looked away.

After a slight irritation on his finger, Harry opened his eyes to see that the wound was healed and his blood was dropping into the top of a miniature replica of Gringotts that hadn't been on the table a moment ago. A few seconds after the drop of blood entered the bank's chimney, the doors opened and a key stuck out of them. Griphook pulled the key out, and a small piece of paper like a receipt came out the doors behind the key. The goblin took it out as well and read, "Harry James Potter has inherited the Potter vault."

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After a quick ride to the vault, the stacks of gold impressed the whole family. Harry took some, but not much because his mom wouldn't let him "...waste your entire inheritance in one day!" They met up with Minerva at Flourish and Blotts, where they found her immersed in a magical romance novel. She put it away immediately and complained about the poor quality of writing. Cindy put it in their basket when Minnie wasn't watching, intent on giving it to her for Christmas. Harry got his school books, as well as the updated version of 'Hogwarts, a History.' He then noticed a book called, 'Quidditch Through the Ages' and asked, "Can I get a broom?"

"Harry," said Minerva, "I'm afraid first years can't have brooms."

"Sorry," said Mark, "But you can have the book."

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They got a few other books, one of which because it talked about 'the Boy-Who-Lived-and-Vanished' that presented all the main theories about him, including that he'd been vaporized from the curse Voldemort sent, only a day late.

They visited Ollivander's and showed him Harry's wand. "Oh yes. Not one of mine. Beechwood and phoenix feather, nine inches. A good match, but not a perfect one."

"He was born in England, but we moved to America when he was a child. We got the wand there. The saleslady knew it wasn't a perfect match and gave us a discount," said Cindy.

"Oh yes, that American rubbish about letting kids run amok with wands before they can read," he muttered to himself. "We'll try a few wands with phoenix feather cores."

After trying a few that all seemed close matches like the wand Harry already had, finally the wandmaker took a wand out saying, "I wonder."

As soon as the wand found itself in Harry's hand, he felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold

sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing dancing spots of light onto the walls.

Ollivander cried, "Oh bravo!" He frowned for a second, and looked as though he were going to say something but changed his mind. "That'll be seven Galleons, Mr. McGonagall."

After Mark paid, Minerva said, "Let's go to the owl emporium so I can keep my promise, and then we'll get some ice cream."

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After Harry picked out a female snowy owl he named Hedwig and Brianna picked out a mostly brown male eagle owl with striking orange eyes she named Barnabus, they went for ice cream and finally back to Aunt Minnie's house.

The house actually belonged to both Minerva and Mark equally as the McGonagall ancestral home, and upon Minerva's death it would fall to Mark and his heirs (although whenever they spoke of that, he said that she may yet fall in love and have kids, which irritated her and made her blush at the same time). It had several rooms spread out over four floors. Minerva had it decorated very conservatively in Gryffindor colors.

At precisely four p.m. the day after their trip to Diagon Alley, a large group of people all holding onto a length of rope landed in a heap on the floor (which had just been treated with a cushioning charm) of a large hall in McGonagall Manor. It had red carpet with very light pastel gold colored walls. The group consisted of Hagrid, the new muggleborn students, and their families. Harry's family was already waiting for them with Aunt Minnie.

Professor McGonagall walked to the front of the room. In her most professional voice and a friendly demeanor, she said, "Welcome everybody. I am Professor McGonagall, - Transfiguration teacher, Head of Gryffindor House, and Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts. Thank you for coming to the orientation."

The hand of a small brown-bushy-haired girl came up immediately.

“Yes, Miss...”

“Granger, Hermione Granger. I was wondering. You see the rest of us met Hagrid at the Leaky Cauldron. I was wondering who that family is.” She spoke quickly out of nervousness.

Minerva smiled. “It might be a good idea for us all to introduce ourselves. That particular family consists of my nephew, Mark McGonagall, his wife Cindy, and their children, Harry and Brianna. Harry will be starting at Hogwarts this year and Brianna will be starting in a few years. They are spending the summer here before all but Harry return to America, where they’ve been living for several years.

“In America, they don’t have the underage restriction on magic that we do here, so Harry and Brianna have both been attending a magic school, as well as a muggle school, since they were five years old. They thought this would be an excellent opportunity to meet some of the students that will be Harry’s classmates. Miss Granger, why don’t you introduce your family?”

After everyone (including Dean Thomas and Justin Finch-Fletchley’s families) had introduced themselves, Hermione’s hand went up again, causing Harry to smile. “Yes, Miss Granger?” said Minerva.

“Actually, I’d like to ask Harry and Brianna what it’s like in the American wizarding school, and what did they teach.” Harry and Brianna both put their heads down, attempting to hide their blushing faces.

Minnie looked at her nephew and niece. “Harry, why don’t you answer first?”

“Um, well, at the school we go to, I mean I used to go to, we wear regular clothes and use pencils, pens, and paper instead of quills, ink, and parchment like at Hogwarts. That’ll probably take getting used to. We had a spell for sharpening pencils though. I learned Latin and wand handling, along with the basics of almost every class at Hogwarts. I’ll find out how much it helped me this September.”

Brianna added, "It was nice to be able to learn magic, although I had to wait six months for a new term to begin after I learned I was a witch. They let you in that school once you've done your first accidental magic, and then you learn how to control it, so accidents became much less frequent."

Hermione said, "I wish I'd had that opportunity. Of course, I'm ever so pleased to be able to attend Hogwarts. I've read all of the class books and a few more besides, but I wish I'd had the opportunity to try out the spells."

"You all will have that opportunity at Hogwarts. The restriction of underage magic applies to all the students who have been raised in Europe, and no one else who was raised in America will be attending Hogwarts. Most students, even the ones born to magical families, will be starting at the same point as you. Are there any more questions?" She waited a few moments, but no hands were raised. "Now I will show you the way meals are served at Hogwarts." She pointed at a table with her hands, and instantly a Hogwarts' style feast appeared.

Harry sat down first and began to fill his plate when Hermione sat down next to him. "Hello Harry," she said. Her face began to get pink. "I, er, was wondering if you could be, er, my study partner."

For a reason he couldn't fathom, his face began to turn pink too. "What exactly do you mean?"

She looked down at the table. "Er, to do class work and homework together, to study together."

"Oh, you mean like friends."

"Well, yes. Almost like friends."

Harry wondered why she'd say, 'Almost like friends' as though she never had friends before. He suspected it was her obviously studious nature that classified her as a bookworm that prevented her from gaining friends. "Sorry, can't do it," he said with a grin.

"I'm...sorry to have bothered you," she said as she began to get up. She sounded like she was about to cry.

“If you want, we can be friends, and study together as well. But I’m not good at being ‘almost like friends.’”

She sat back down with a huge grin that showed her buckteeth, but more importantly it showed real happiness. “Friends? Do you mean it?”

He now knew he was right and she didn’t have many, if any, friends. “Of course I mean it. Look, Aunt Minnie just got me an owl. I’ll send you a letter every week until school starts. We’ll sit together on the train.”

She looked down. “I, er, don’t have an owl.”

“Then I’ll have my owl wait for your reply. I’ll introduce you to her after dinner.”

In her excitement, she hugged Harry for a moment and then pulled her hands back and blushed furiously. “Er, thanks,” she said.

“You’re welcome, Hermione.”

The hug didn’t go unnoticed by the others at the table. The Grangers were thrilled to see that their little girl seemed to have made a friend. They suspected she had a crush on him as well. Brianna knew she had something to harass her brother with for the rest of the summer and probably well into the school year. The boys figured that Harry was just as much of a bookworm/teacher’s pet as Hermione seemed to be – probably worse since he was related to a teacher. They knew that they didn’t want to be friends with either of them.

After they were done eating, Harry and Hermione snuck out of the huge room and went to his bedroom. Hermione was impressed as she looked around the mansion. “I wish I had time to show you the library,” said Harry.

Her eyes widened. “There’s a library here?”

He chuckled. When they got to his room, Blinky was in there dusting. Hermione let out a small shriek.

"It's alright, Hermione. Blinky is a house elf. Blinky, I told you that you don't have to clean my room for me."

"Blinky is sorry, Master Harry. But Blinky is knowing you isn't supposed to be here now."

"It's alright. I'd like you to meet my new friend, Hermione Granger." Hermione smiled at being introduced as his friend.

Blinky bowed low. "It is an honor meeting your Grangy, sir."

Hermione asked, "Are you their butler or something?"

"I is Blinky the house elf, bound to serve the McGonagall family forever," he said proudly as he wore a fancy linen that displayed an ornate 'M' on it.

"Serve? You mean like a slave? You don't get paid." Her face fell.

"Of course Blinky isn't being paid," he answered patiently, knowing that she was a muggleborn and didn't understand many wizarding customs.

Hermione turned to Harry. "You own a slave?"

"No, I don't own a slave. Aunt Minnie does. My family lives in America. Elves aren't slaves there. My dad tried to talk her into freeing Blinky, but she wouldn't here of it."

Blinky now looked terrified. "You...your family isn't wanting Blinky if you is inheriting McGonagall mansion?"

"Not as a slave," said Harry. "I'm sure dad wouldn't kick you out on the street, though. But you don't have to worry; I'm sure Aunt Minnie will be around for many years."

"Y-yes sir. Blinky must go now," he said as though in a trance, "back to the kitchen to get the plates."

"The kitchen?" asked Hermione. "You cooked the food we ate, didn't you?"

"Yes. Didn't you like it?"

"It was wonderful." She then turned to Harry. "You knew it was made by slave labor but ate the food anyway?"

"If I refused to eat, all that would accomplish is me starving to death. I'm staying here all summer."

"Oh, I see your point. But there must be something we can do."

"I hope so. Aunt Minnie is nice to Blinky, but there are some masters who punish their elves."

"P-punish," she said with a horrified expression.

"I should say torture. They order their elves to do things like bang their heads on walls and iron their hands."

Hermione's eyes were starting to tear. "Iron their hands?"

"It's disgusting! Even Aunt Minnie is against that. Thank goodness that doesn't happen to the elves at Hogwarts."

"Wait. Hogwarts has house elves."

"Probably more than any other place in Europe. You heard my aunt. 'Now I'll show you...'"

"...the way meals are served at Hogwarts." She sighed. "Now I'm not sure if I..."

"Please don't change your mind. At least they're not tortured there. Maybe we can do something about the house elf enslavement. If you don't go, there won't be anyone there who agrees with me."

She smiled at her first friend. "Maybe we can make a difference. What if we form a club and give away information to students. Maybe we can call it," she paused, "The Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare."

"No, people would call us spew. We need it to be something good." He paused and smiled. "What about 'Community for Advancing the Rights of Elves?' C.A.R.E."

"That's perfect!" declared Hermione.

"Maybe I can spend some of my inheritance on this," he said without thinking.

"What inheritance?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Oh, never mind. I, um, don't want to talk about it."

"Oh. I'm sorry. It's none of my business if you've inherited from someone."

"That's fine. I do have some money I should be able to use to start it."

"Maybe we can get badges and sell them to try to make more money for our literature so that you don't have to keep funding it. I'll also talk to my parents and see if they'll donate any money. We'll definitely need to stay in contact to prepare. You were going to introduce me to your owl."

"Yeah." He walked up to the snowy owl that was perched in his room. "Hedwig, this is my friend Hermione."

"Hello Hedwig. You are adorable!" Hedwig hooted in agreement.

"We'll be asking you to carry letters between us this summer. Is that alright, girl?" She hooted again. Harry patted her on the head and then said, "We'd better be headed back."

"I never would've expected my brother to sneak a girl to his room less than an hour after meeting her," said Brianna with a smirk from the doorway. Hermione's face turned red with embarrassment while Harry's turned pink with anger.

"What are you following me for, you little snoop? I ought to hex you!"

“For your information, Aunt Minnie sent me to find Hermione before the portkey left without her.”

“Oh yes,” said Hermione recovering. “I’ve got to go. It was great to meet you! Owl me.” She ran off, leaving the siblings alone.

“So, my brother’s got a girlfriend.”

He blushed. “I do not! She’s just my friend!”

“And she’s a girl.”

“But not girlfriend.”

“Do you think she’s cute?” His face was totally red now. “Ah ha! You do think your girlfriend’s cute!” She turned around and left, closing the door behind her, thus insuring that she had the last word.”

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The weeks passed swiftly, with Harry and Hermione owling back and forth at least twice a week. During the first week, Hermione surprised him by sending a wallet-sized photo of herself that had been taken during the last school year. He decided that he would be expected to send her a picture as well. Unfortunately for him, Brianna walked in the room when Harry asked his parents for a picture to send Hermione. If his dad hadn’t grabbed the wand out of Harry’s pocket, he would’ve hexed her. That was when Harry decided to start carrying both of his wands.

He soon got his parents to take him back to Diagon Alley (with Brianna as well), and after talking about C.A.R.E. with his parents, they agreed to let him take out money to order fifty badges and some literature. They met the Grangers at Fortesque’s ice cream right after the trip to the bank, and they went to a shop that made magical badges. The Grangers insisted that they paid for half of the C.A.R.E. badges once Harry and Hermione agreed on a simple design that only used the sticking charm.

They also bought books that they believed would help them create the literature, and after Mark noticed a man with long blond hair,

fancy robes, and a fancy cane kicking a house elf, he ran into a nearby shop and bought a magical camera. He found them again and got a few great zoomed in shots of the elf being hit with the cane and kicked as they made their way toward Knockturn Alley. One photo focused on the elf's appearance in a filthy tea towel with bruises all over his body. One photo did include the wizard's face.

"Must be a respected member of high society," hissed Mark loathfully. "Anyway, I think one of these photos should be good for the cover of your literature. Just make sure not to show that jerk's face or he'll probably sue or something for defamation of his lack-of-character."

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Harry finally got to show the McGonagall library to Hermione on his birthday, when she spent most of the day at the Manor. She was simply amazed at the size of the library, and how many out-of-print books were inside. She found tomes on almost every topic, including a diary written by hand that actually described the way that some wizards started harassing a group of elves because they were small and looked funny. The elves fought back after several had been tortured to death. Only one of the wizards survived (the one who wrote the diary), and he told a different story to his fellow wizards, wherein the elves attacked them unprovoked. At the end of a long and bloody war, European elves were forced into signing a magical contract with almost every old pureblood wizarding family that their descendents would serve the wizards' descendants forever. Fortunately some elves refused to sign it, and soon became fugitives, outcasts of society who eventually fled to the new world when it was discovered. Aunt Minnie paled when they showed her that, asking her to magically copy that for them.

After that, they'd had the party, where Harry hadn't invited anyone else but the Grangers and his own family. His dad got him two wand holsters that could attach to a belt or tie onto either an arm or leg. They'd been charmed to repel summoning spells, and were invisible to everyone but the wearer once they were properly attached. The wands could not accidentally fall out or be removed with physical force by anyone but the wearer. If it was on your wrist, the wearer could set a magic word he or she could say to have it shot into his

hand (like a spring pushed the wand out of the holster). Harry was thrilled that he had such a great way to keep both of his wands with him, one on each wrist. He practiced catching his wands with either hand when shot out of the holster. Fortunately each holster let the owner set the magic words. Harry chose 'Old Wand' for his left and 'New Wand' for his right. However, when they started flying out of his holsters during normal conversations about his wands, he changed it to 'Old Sparks' and 'New Sparks.'

Aunt Minnie gave him a ten pound (weightless got the attention of muggles) seven compartment trunk so that he could be better organized at school. She also gave him a weightless double-capacity book bag that she claimed came free with the trunk. Hermione really wanted one of them.

The Grangers gave Harry a fancy magical stationery set complete with special quills, ink, and parchment.

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Before he knew it, Harry was at Kings Cross Station and pushing a trolley through Platform Nine-and-Three-Quarters. He'd managed to completely keep Minerva out of his mind for the first time the day before. His family soon joined him as he gazed in awe at the train. He still had the model of it that his aunt had given him, but there was something special about seeing the real thing.

"Hello Harry," said Hermione from behind him. He turned and saw the Grangers, along with several other families, including a very large group of redheads.

"Hi Hermione," he said with a smile, "We should say goodbye to our families and get a compartment." She nodded and Harry walked to his family, hugging them each, even Brianna, in turn. "I'll talk to you tonight in our mirrors," he whispered to his sister before kissing her on the cheek. He then looked at all three of them. "I love you."

"We love you too," said Cindy as she kissed his cheek one last time. "I'm so proud of you!"

Together Harry McGonagall and Hermione Granger boarded the
Hogwarts Express.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 2 – Ready or Not Hogwarts, Here We Come

As they walked onto the train, they noticed that most of the compartments were already filled. Through the windows on the doors, they saw a set of red-haired twins looking at what appeared to be a tarantella that their dark-skinned friend was holding in a box. They saw one compartment that seemed to be filled with first years, including a brown-haired boy who was holding a toad. They'd have gone inside, except that it only had room for one person.

"You can go in there, if you want, Harry," said Hermione sadly. "I'm sure I'll find somewhere to sit."

Harry kept walking with her. "Hermione, I said we'd sit together, and that's what we'll do! I don't lie to my friends." He then smiled at her. "Besides, we need to do some planning for C.A.R.E."

"This compartment seems empty," the bushy-haired girl said with a grin.

"Good thing, too. It looks like the last one."

Without hesitation, Harry opened the door and allowed Hermione to go in before him. They put their stuff on the shelves above them and sat down together. "I was thinking," said Hermione, "that it would be better to wait about a week to start talking about house-elf rights. That way we might get to know people a bit before..."

"Before we convince them we're nutters," he said chuckling. "Sure. The first Saturday after classes begin we'll set out the fliers in our common room to start with our house mates."

Hermione got a worried look on her face. "That's assuming that we're in the same house. I know your aunt is the head of Gryffindor. Do you think that's where you'll end up?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I'd like to think I'm brave enough for Gryffindor, smart enough for Ravenclaw, loyal enough for Hufflepuff, and sneaky enough for Slytherin. But I don't want to be in that house!"

“But Slytherin is supposed to be for ambitious people, not sneaky.”

“It’s the people who will step on anybody’s toes to climb the ladder of success. According to Aunt Minnie, not all of them are dark, but it is the preferred house of dark wizards. Even the ones who aren’t dark put their own ambitions above everything else. They just don’t have an ambition to go dark. Aunt Minnie also warned me that the head of Slytherin completely favors his house unfairly, so be careful around him. He’s the potions master here. His name is Snape.”

“Don’t you mean, Professor Snape?”

Harry whispered, “Don’t tell anyone else this, but my aunt says he doesn’t teach at all, so he shouldn’t be called a professor. She’s been trying to get him sacked for years, bringing the headmaster proof that he’s a horrible teacher, but Dumbledore won’t listen.”

Hermione looked shocked. “But, but she’s deputy headmistress. He’s got to listen to her!”

“Apparently not. Just make sure not to aggravate Snape.”

“That’s what my brothers say,” said a voice from the door. They turned to see yet another redhead who appeared to be their age. “About Snape, I mean. To hear Fred and George talk about him, he’ll give you a detention for not wearing Slytherin robes, no matter what house you’re in. I’m Ron, by the way, Ron Weasley.”

“Harry McGonagall.” He reached out and shook Ron’s hand.

“Hermione Granger,” she said also shaking Ron’s hand.

“Do you mind if I sit here? Everywhere else is full.”

“That’s fine,” said Harry, so Ron sat across from them.

“This is Scabbers, by the way,” he said, indicating the rat in a cage he was carrying.

“This is Hedwig,” Harry said, pointing at the snowy owl in a cage that was on the seat next to Ron.

“So are you two friends, or did you just have no other choice where to sit?”

“We’re friends,” said Harry, causing Hermione to smile. “We met at a muggleborn orientation.”

“So you’re both muggleborn, then,” asked Ron nonchalantly.

Hermione nodded while Harry spoke. “Technically, my dad’s a squib and my mom’s a muggle. I’m originally from London, but moved to America when I was really little. My little sister’s a witch, too. She’ll be coming here in a few years.”

“I’ve got a little sister, too. This seems a long way to travel for school, even if you are from here,” said Ron.

“My aunt is one of the professors here. It would hurt her feelings if we didn’t come here.”

Ron’s eyes widened. “McGonagall? She’s your aunt?”

“Technically my great aunt, but yeah.”

“Wow.” Ron then turned to Hermione. “Well, muggleborns don’t have any more problems learning magic than anyone else. No one’s allowed to do magic before Hogwarts anyway.”

“Actually,” said Harry with a grin, “It’s different in America. There is no age restriction, just secrecy. You can do all the magic you want as long as it’s not in front of muggles that don’t know about us.”

Ron’s eyes went wide. “Wicked!”

Hermione said, “Harry has been going to magic school since he was five and probably knows all of the first year spells already. We’re going to be studying a lot together this year. Would you care to join us?”

Ron’s face turned pink and he looked down. He didn’t want to spend all his time at Hogwarts studying. He was hoping to get Fred and George to let him join in their pranks. “Er, I’ll probably be too...busy.”

“No problem,” said Harry nicely.

“Harry,” said Hermione, “Why don’t we practice magic now. I’m sure the ministry doesn’t care if we do it on the train.”

Harry grinned as Ron paled. “Sure. I’ll go first.” Harry muttered, “New sparks,” causing his wand to spring out of his invisible wrist holster into his right hand.

“Wow!” said Ron with his eyes wide. “You conjured that out of thin air!”

“Of course he didn’t, silly,” said Hermione in a condescending tone. “He received an invisible wand holster for his birthday last month.” She deliberately didn’t mention the other one, since she figured her friend might want that to be a secret.

“That’s still wicked!” said Ron.

“Thanks.” Harry then pointed his wand at Scabber’s cage and said, “Wingardium Leviosa,” causing the cage to rise as the rat, apparently afraid of heights, started running around the cage frantically squealing.

“Put him down!” said Ron in a panic. “Can’t you see he’s scared?”

“Sorry,” said Harry as he lowered the cage.

Hermione pulled her wand out, along with a book of matches. “I read about this spell in ‘*A Beginner’s Guide to Transfiguration*.’ One of the first spells is to change a match into a needle.” She then took out a match and set it on the seat. After her first attempt, the match was silvery and pointed, but clearly it was still a match. She put down her head in shame.

Harry, who’d learned this spell the year before, said, “Hermione, I think you didn’t move your wand exactly right. Let me show you.” He then demonstrated the movement with his wand, and she tried again. This time it became a needle.

Hermione smiled brightly at him, fighting the impulse to hug him.
“Thanks, Harry!”

“It was nothing. You just hadn’t seen a demonstration yet. It’s hard to describe wand movements in a book. They should make a video of it.”

“That would be extremely helpful!”

“A what?” asked Ron.

“A muggle device that shows moving pictures,” said Harry, “Sort of like a magical photograph.”

“Oh.” Ron’s face turned purple as he realized that they were looking at him expectantly. He scanned his brain to come up with some spell to demonstrate, but could only think of one. “My brother George told me one that’s supposed to turn Scabbers yellow.” He then pulled out his old-looking wand.

“Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow,

Turn this stupid, fat rat yellow.”

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed gray.

“Are you sure that’s a real spell?” asked Hermione. “Well, it’s not very good, is it?”

Ron muttered, “It must have been one of his stupid jokes.”

At that moment, the snack trolley came to their compartment. “Would you like any snacks?”

Harry smiled. “Sure. I’ll take three chocolate frogs and some Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum. Would you like anything, Hermione?”

She smiled. “My parents don’t really approve, but I would like to try a few Licorice Wands.”

“How about you, Ron?”

"I've got sandwiches," he muttered miserably.

"Are you sure you don't want anything?"

"Well, I wouldn't mind a few Chocolate Frogs and a box of Every Flavor Beans."

Harry looked at Ron in surprise. "If that's what you want, but honestly! I hate those beans. You never know what you're getting with those disgusting things. A brown one may taste like chocolate, or it might taste like manure! Why Bertie Bott thinks people want vomit-flavored beans I'll never know!"

"That's disgusting!" said Hermione with a look of revulsion. "At least with muggle candy you know what you're getting!"

"All right, I'll get gum instead of the beans," said Ron.

After Harry had paid for it all, he closed the window saying, "I knew a wizard in one of my American classes who had a chocolate frog jump out his window. Ever since then I've been paranoid about it."

After they'd eaten their candy, Harry and Ron looked at their Chocolate Frog cards. Harry got one of Dumbledore, and read the information out loud. Before he could look at the others, there was a knock at the door. A round-faced boy was standing there. He looked on the verge of tears. Harry magically opened the door and the boy stepped in.

"Y-you haven't seen a toad anywhere, have you?"

"Your pet got away?" asked Harry. The boy nodded. "What's its name?"

"Trevor," said the boy.

Harry pointed his wand out the door. "Accio, Trevor!"

The three kids in the compartment with him watched in amazement as the toad flew right into Harry's hand. "You really should get a cage for him."

“Yeah. Thanks a lot. I’m Neville, by the way, Neville Longbottom.”

Harry shook Neville’s hand and remembered part of the history of the Voldemort war. “Are you related to Frank and Alice Longbottom?”

Neville looked down and shifted his feet uncomfortably. “Er, Yes. They’re my parents.”

Harry realized that Neville was uncomfortable with this topic. “They’re famous heroes even in America for defying Voldemort.” Everyone winced. “Sorry. In America we’re not afraid of names. Mind you, if he showed up I’d be scared enough, but the only thing scary about that name is trying to spell it. A lot of people spelled it with an ‘l’ instead of an ‘e’ on the history test at school.”

“Y-you learned about that in a school?”

“Harry’s been going to an American wizarding school since he was five,” said Hermione proudly.

“Why don’t you sit here and I’ll tell you about it,” said Harry, glad they’d gotten off the topic of Neville’s parents. He certainly didn’t want to be the one to tell everybody about their condition, especially since Neville obviously didn’t want to talk about it.

Neville still seemed a bit nervous that Harry would talk about his parents, and seemed visibly relieved that he hardly mentioned them at all as he described important battles that he’d learned about in school.

It was during this conversation that Ron said, “Did you hear about Gringotts?”

“Yes,” said Neville nervously, “The D-daily Prophet said that some dark wizard broke into a vault that had been emptied already. I-it was the day after my birthday.”

Neville and Ron went on to explain all that was in the paper about the break-in and how the goblins insisted that nothing was stolen as Harry and Hermione listened intently. Hermione said, “But if the vault hadn’t been emptied earlier, something would have been stolen.”

“Exactly,” said Harry, “The goblins are trying to pretend that their security measures prevented the theft, but they didn’t. Hopefully they’ll come up with a way to prevent that happening again. I hate to think that someone could rob my safe.”

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Before long, the train pulled into Hogsmeade and the students were told to leave their luggage and disembark. It wasn’t long after they stepped off the train that Harry and Hermione heard a familiar voice call out, “Firs’ years,” and they found Hagrid. They knew from the orientation that Hagrid brought the first year students to the castle on boats. Harry and Hermione shared a boat with Ron and Neville. All of the students, Harry included, stared at the castle in awe as they got their first look at it. After they reached their destination, they walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

“Everyone here?” asked Hagrid before he raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes stood there. She had a very stern face. Harry smiled broadly and said, “Hi Aunt Minnie,” causing some chuckles from the other students as the professor's ears went pink.

She looked at the blond-haired boy with an irritated expression, although Harry could see the faintest hint of a smile on her face. “Harry, what did I tell you this morning?”

“I’m sorry, Professor McGonagall,” he said with a serious expression on his face, despite the fact that he really wanted to laugh.

“It’s alright, Mr. McGonagall. Just don’t let it happen again.” She then looked at the other students. “If you’ll follow me, I’ll lead you to the Great Hall, where the sorting will take place.”

As they were walking, he heard some of the students whispering, ‘Aunt Minnie,’ while giggling. One boy who had very light-blond hair (Harry’s was a dirty-blond color) walked up to Harry with one goon on each side of him.

“So, you’re McGonagall’s nephew. I believe she called you Harry. Being well-connected in school is very important. The head of Slytherin house is my godfather. My name’s Malfoy, Draco Malfoy.”

“Really,” said Harry, trying to imagine what kind of parent would have that that evil git as their kid’s godfather, and what kind of child would be proud of it. For some reason that kid reminded him of the man his dad had photographed abusing a house elf. “Snape’s your godfather?”

“Yes. You’ve heard of him?”

“I have,” Harry said simply with a neutral expression while Hermione listened to the conversation.

“Good. Associating with the right sort of people who have more connections can be beneficial. I can help you there. My family, as one of the oldest pureblood families in Europe, has all of the right connections. The most important thing you need to do is to avoid hanging out with the wrong sort. I can help you there.” Draco extended his hand to Harry, expecting him to shake it.

Harry glared at Draco, wondering how he had the nerve to brag about the purity of his blood, something he had absolutely no control over. “I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thank you.” Harry then turned around and walked to the front of the line, followed closely by Hermione. Ron and Neville had stayed toward the back of the line to avoid Malfoy because they’d both heard of him.

Before long they were waiting to be sorted. Most of the kids were nervous about how that was done, but Aunt Minnie had told him what would really happen and sworn him to secrecy. When he saw how nervous Hermione was, he whispered to her, “Aunt Minnie told me not to tell anyone what will happen, but it’s not a test to be nervous about. You don’t have to know anything at all to be sorted, I promise. Although if it were a test, you’d be sure to get the best grade.”

She blushed and whispered, “Thanks, but I’m not all that smart. I just...”

“Being smart isn’t something to be ashamed of. You know that there’s a whole house here that’s devoted to being smart.”

At that moment, they were escorted into the Great Hall for the sorting. As they walked in, Harry looked at the ceiling, which was showing stars. Hermione said, “It’s not really the sky. It’s just enchanted to look like it. I read about it in...”

“Hogwarts, a History,” said Harry, grinning.

Hermione blushed. “It’s a great book, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely, but I will say that not much changed for the latest edition.”

Her eyes went wide. “What edition did you first read?”

“The 1980 edition. Aunt Minnie gave it to my parents before we moved to America. I had dad read it to me when I learned I was magical.”

Minerva placed a hat on a three-legged stool.

After the hat sang its song, “Abbot, Hannah,” was the first person Minerva called forward to put on the sorting hat.

After a moment’s pause, the hat yelled, “HUFFLEPUFF!”

Kid after kid was called in alphabetical order until finally, “Granger, Hermione,” was called. The small bushy-haired girl timidly walked up to the stool and put on the hat.

Harry watched nervously as well, hoping he and his best friend would end up in the same house. Finally the hat shouted, “RAVENCLAW!” and she took off the hat and joined the table that was applauding with a worried look on her face.

Harry was a bit surprised that Neville Longbottom became a Gryffindor; he seemed more like a Hufflepuff to Harry. He wasn’t surprised, however, when Draco Malfoy was sorted into Slytherin. Harry shook his head as Draco arrogantly strutted over to Slytherin

table as though it was an honor to be sorted into the house that values ambition above loyalty, intelligence, and bravery.

“McGonagall, Harry,” his aunt called as many whispers at the tables began.

Harry heard people saying, ‘Is he related to her?’ ‘Bet he’s a Gryffindor,’ and ‘Doesn’t look like her,’ as well as similar things as he walked toward the hat. He could see Aunt Minnie looking frustrated at the whispering as well when he put on the hat.

“Let’s see,” said the sorting hat, “Who do we have here? Harry...Wait a minute, I distinctly heard the name McGonagall. Pretty sneaky to change your name, hmm?”

“Please don’t tell anyone. Please don’t tell...”

“All right, all right. I never reveal what I find in people’s heads. I can see that this wasn’t your doing anyway. I don’t sense any real thirst to prove yourself; seems like you don’t have self-esteem issues. I can see that you’ve got plenty of courage, and the loyalty you have to your family is admirable. Not a bad mind either, but where to put you.”

“Ravenclaw, please?” Harry silently asked the hat. “It’s where you sorted my friend Hermione.”

“Are you certain? You could do well in Gryffindor, you know.”

Harry smiled. “I know, and I’m sure that’s where Aunt Minnie wants me, but I’d really rather be with my best friend.”

“Very well,” said the hat. Then it shouted, “RAVENCLAW!”

Harry happily took off the hat and saw the slightly disappointed look on his aunt’s face. As he walked toward his table, he saw that most students that weren’t in his house were watching the next kid walking up to the hat. He sat down next to an ecstatic Hermione, who said, “I was so worried we wouldn’t be in the same house after I was sorted here. I hope you’re not disappointed. I also hope your aunt isn’t either.” She talked a bit fast, and Harry found it a bit amusing.

"This is fine. As much as I love my aunt, I think it's better if she's not my head of house. People would always blame favoritism if I achieve anything, and if I got in trouble and someone didn't think I was punished enough, they'd claim the same thing. Besides, just because I'm in Ravenclaw doesn't mean I can't talk to her."

As they were speaking, the other first years were sorted. They were surprised to see a set of twins, Padma and Parvati Patil, separated into Ravenclaw and Gryffindor respectively.

"You see," said Harry when that happened. "They're not going to stop being twin sisters just because they're in different houses, are they?"

Hermione motioned Padma to come and sit by them. "Hello Padma Patil," she said, "I'm Hermione Granger and this is Harry McGonagall."

"Hello. It's nice to meet you," said the girl.

Harry said, "It's good to meet you, too. I guess you're the smart twin, hmm."

The girl blushed, and for some reason Hermione looked slightly annoyed. "I, I guess so. She's more interested in things like fashion than her education, but she's still bright. She's more popular. Are you really related to the head of Gryffindor house?"

After Harry nodded, they turned their attention back to the sorting. After Ron Weasley was made a, "GRYFFINDOR," and Blaise Zabini was made a, "SLYTHERIN," Albus Dumbledore stood up and said a few words (Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!), and the feast began.

Harry got to meet some of the other Ravenclaws, including another first year boy named Terry Boot as they were eating the magnificent dinner the house elves had prepared. Harry thought about talking to his aunt when he was done eating, but wasn't sure if that was proper or not. He didn't want to embarrass her in front of her colleagues. He figured he'd find her office the next day. While he was lost in thought, he was startled by the entrance of the Grey Lady, Ravenclaw's resident ghost. She wasn't very talkative, but seemed very smart and kind to Harry as she welcomed the new students.

When Harry finished eating, he looked up at the head table to see his aunt talking animatedly with an extremely short man. He turned to the nearest older student, who was a pretty girl with long, curly hair who was wearing a prefect's badge. "Excuse me," he said, gaining her attention.

"Yes, er, Harry McGonagall, right?"

Harry smiled. "Yes. I was wondering who that short man is that Professor McGonagall is talking to."

"That's Professor Flitwick, the charms teacher and our head of house. Are you related to Professor McGonagall then?"

"Yes, she's my great aunt."

Penelope smiled. "She's probably talking to him about you, then. By the way, I'm Penelope Clearwater, but almost everybody calls me Penny. I'm the prefect who will lead you all to the dorm after the feast."

"It's good to meet you Penny."

At that moment, Harry felt a searing pain in his forehead. He immediately put his right hand on the spot where it hurt. He noticed that a man who could be no one but Professor Snape (based off of his appearance) had just noticed him. Next to him was a man wearing a strange turban who was facing the other way.

A moment later he felt a Legilimens attack and immediately pushed the greasy git out of his mind with all the force he could muster. The potions professor, caught completely off guard, fell backwards onto the floor, gaining Aunt Minnie's attention. She looked from Snape to her nephew and mouthed, 'Occlumency?' to which he nodded. He saw her expression change from concern to fury as she turned toward the 'professor' who was being helped up by the man in the turban.

"What's wrong?" asked Hermione, Penny, and Padma at once with concerned expressions on their faces.

“Snape!” said Harry with gritted teeth. “He tried to read my mind! Aunt Min, I mean Professor McGonagall warned me that he would. He certainly didn’t waste any time!”

Hermione nodded in understanding while the others stared blankly at him. Penny’s eyebrows moved closer as she appeared to be in deep thought. Finally she said, “Legilimency?”

“Exactly,” said Harry. They then explained it to the others who had noticed Harry’s momentary headache. Many were amused at how Harry had caused Snape to fall off his chair. They soon saw Dumbledore escorting a very angry Minerva and Severus into a small room connected to the hall. For about half a second, yells were heard from the room until somebody apparently put up a silencing charm. Harry laughed. “I almost feel sorry for Snape.”

“That should be illegal,” said Penelope, “It’s an invasion of privacy.”

“Aun, Professor McGonagall has complained several times to Dumbledore, but he won’t do anything about it. That’s why she insisted that both me and my little sister learn occlumency before coming here.”

A few minutes later, Harry started laughing out loud when Snape left the room with a red handprint on the side of his face, evidence that he’d been slapped by Aunt Minnie. They both looked furious and Dumbledore, who was the last to leave, looked rather worn out. He walked up to the podium wearily. He quickly made some start of term notices, including avoiding the third floor corridor, “And now bedtime. Off you trot!”

“Well all of you first-years, follow me to your home away from home for the next seven years – Ravenclaw Tower.” She obviously felt a great deal of pride in the tower as she led them toward the west side of the castle, up several flights of stairs.

“Why do the staircases move?” asked Harry.

“Magic,” Penny said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"I know it's magic, but what's the point in staircases randomly moving. That's not very helpful and can make you late for classes, or even get you lost. I mean it would be one thing if you could stand on the edge of the staircase and say where you want to go, but this is stupid."

Penelope, along with everyone else, stood there for a few moments thinking about what he said. Finally, Miss Clearwater said, "You're right Harry. It is stupid, but that's the way it is."

Hermione whispered into Harry's ears, "Maybe we'll find a way to change that while we're here," causing him to grin.

"That'll put us in the newest edition of 'Hogwarts, a History.'" Hermione laughed with him at that idea, but he could tell that she would love to be mentioned in that book.

Finally they reached their destination. They were facing a life-size portrait of a man with very messy white hair and a thick moustache wearing glasses and blue wizard robes. He smiled at them. "Hi, everyone. My name's Al. What's the password?"

"Relativity," said Penelope. After the door opened, she whispered to the students, "Whatever that means."

Harry looked around to see a large common room decorated in Ravenclaw colors. The carpet was bronze-colored while the walls were painted light blue. The padded chairs and couches were blue while the tables were wooden. There were portraits of various geniuses sitting at desks reading. The bulletin board had a few announcements on it, including Quidditch team tryouts open to second-years and above. They were shown two staircases at the other end of the room leading down, the one on the right led to the boys' dormitory and the one on the left led to the girls.'

Before going down to his dormitory, Harry thanked Penny and said goodnight to Hermione. He found doors on his right labeled with different year numbers on them. Harry saw that the first door was labeled for seventh-years and they went down from there. Across from the fourth-year dormitories was a rather large bathroom. When he finally reached his dorm, he opened the door to find a room with four large four-poster beds that had blue bed curtains and blankets.

He quickly identified his trunk (it was the only one with multiple compartments) next to one of the beds and took out a pair of pajamas. After he changed, he pulled out an advanced potions book to review. He had a feeling that Snape was gonna give him a hard time in class. He wasn't sure when that would be since the schedules would be handed out the next morning, but he did know that he wanted to be ready. While he was reading, his dorm-mates Terry Boot, Michael Corner, and Anthony Goldstein showed up and got ready for bed.

"What are you studying already for?" asked Terry. "I know we're Ravenclaws but we don't have homework yet."

"I think Snape's gonna try something in potions class and I want to be ready. Aun, Professor McGonagall warned me about him, and he's already mad at me."

"So she is your aunt?" asked Michael.

"Technically my dad's aunt, but yes."

"Why is Snape already mad at you?" asked Anthony.

"He tried to read my mind during the feast and I knocked him off his chair."

"Snape is that guy?" asked Michael. "How did that happen?"

After Harry explained mind reading and the defense against it, the others were in awe. "Wow!" said Terry.

"My aunt didn't want that git rummaging through my mind, so she insisted that I learn it before coming here." He sighed. "I better keep practicing though. I don't think he's gonna admit defeat that easily."

-

After Harry's roommates went to sleep, he pulled his two-way mirror out of his trunk and snuck down to the common room. "Brianna."

Thirty seconds later, her smiling face appeared. "Hi Harry. We traveled by international floo, so we're home already. My classes start

tomorrow. How was the train ride? What house were you sorted in? Have you kissed Hermione yet?"

Harry blushed but hissed, "I am not gonna kiss Hermione, and if you say that again I'll hang up on you!"

"Fine," she said with a smirk, "Denial is the first stage. Did you make Gryffindor?"

"Actually, I'm in Slytherin."

"What?" His sister looked terrified. How?"

"All I had to do was lie to my sister."

"You! Come on, what house are you in?"

"Ravenclaw."

"Is Hermione in there too?"

"Yes. Snape already tried to read my mind at dinner."

She looked concerned. "Really? What happened?"

He told her about Snape falling off his chair, and about Aunt Minnie slapping him. She was laughing her head off by the time she was called down to dinner.

"Dinner?" asked Harry, confused for a moment, "Oh yeah, the time difference. Duh."

"Yeah big brother. I thought you were supposed to be a smart Ravenclaw. I've got to go now. See ya!"

"See you later. Tell everyone I said hi."

-

The next morning he met Hermione in the common room talking to a few of the girls. Padma was there, along with the other girls in their year: Mandy Brocklehurst and Lisa Turpin. A cute second-year Asian

girl named Cho Chang was telling them what to expect for their first year.

Hermione and Harry sat with Padma and Anthony at breakfast. After Flitwick handed them their schedules, Harry looked at them in horror. Hermione, seeing his reaction, checked her schedule. "Oh dear. We have two hours of Potions with the Hufflepuffs right after breakfast."

The meal became a solemn affair after that. Sort of like when an inmate on Death Row knows it's their last meal. The first year Ravenclaws slowly made their way downstairs to the dungeons, knowing exactly what to expect.

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Harry paid attention from the very beginning of class, taking notes as Snape talked about bottling fame and brewing glory until finally Snape yelled, "McGonagall!" Harry's head shot up as he reinforced his occlumency shields. However, instead of reading his mind, Snape started asking him questions. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Harry stopped himself from smiling. "Draught of Living Death, sir." Harry knew this was a N.E.W.T. level potion, so he was glad he'd read up on them the night before.

Snape appeared irritated. "Where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Harry noticed that Hermione's hand was up as he answered, "The stomach of a goat, although there are probably a few in your cabinet in case someone gets poisoned here." There were several chuckles at that comment as Snape's ears went red.

"Five points from Ravenclaw for your cheek, McGonagall! What is the difference between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

"Nothing, sir," Harry said coldly, knowing full well that he should have earned his house at least twenty points by now. "It also goes by the name of aconite."

Snape's face was red now, and he turned to the other students. "WELL, why aren't you all copying this down?"

While the others wrote down those questions, Snape tried to catch Harry off guard and attacked his mind again. Harry felt the stronger assault, but still pushed him out, causing the bully to stagger where he stood for a moment, until he said, "Five more points from Ravenclaw, because Mr. McGonagall doesn't seem to think he needs to take notes."

Hermione, who'd been getting madder and madder while watching the exchange, blurted out, "Why should he write them down when he answered the questions?"

"Ten points from Ravenclaw, Miss...Granger I believe." She nodded with an angry expression. "For speaking out of turn."

-

Every student, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff alike, were fuming when they left the classroom. Some of the Hufflepuffs came up to Harry and said Snape should've given him fifty points. They had some free time before lunch, so Harry said to Hermione, "I'm gonna talk to my aunt! This is ridiculous!"

"May I come with you?" asked Hermione, "as a witness to how Snape was behaving."

Harry smiled that she didn't use the term professor to apply to that creep. "If you'd like."

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Soon they found themselves outside the Transfiguration classroom as a class was just leaving. Harry walked inside and said, "Professor McGonagall, may we speak to you in your office?"

Minnie smiled. "You're always welcome Harry. Hello Hermione."

-

When they were in her office, Harry said, "First of all, I want to make sure that you're ok with my being a Ravenclaw."

She put her hand on Harry's blond head. "Of course I am. I, of course, had hoped you'd be in Gryffindor, but Ravenclaw is an honorable house as well."

"Good. Now, do I want to know what happened besides you slapping Snape last night?"

She chuckled. "Nothing but yelling that fell on deaf ears I'm afraid. I think Snape would have to actually murder a student in the middle of a feast before the headmaster," she then paused, "Never mind. I know you just came from potions. How did it go?"

"Awful! That so-called teacher started on Harry from the moment class started! He tried to stump him with questions about N.E.W.T. level potions, but Harry got them all right," Minerva smiled proudly, "...but he took points from him anyway! And then..." Hermione went in a rant until Minerva got up and opened a cabinet to reveal something Harry hadn't seen before.

"This is my pensieve. I acquired it nine years ago while collecting evidence against Snape. The headmaster, of course, completely ignored the evidence, but I still make use of this marvelous device. Harry, I'm going to hold my wand to your head and I'll need you to remember exactly what happened in class today."

Once she'd extracted the memory, she summoned an elf to bring lunch into the room as they watched the 'lesson' played out. Minerva gave points appropriately to Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff for correctly answering questions. She also gave back every point Snape stole during the class.

"Since the headmaster will do nothing to stop Snape's blatant disregard of school policies, I will. He shouldn't be allowed to give and take points! Just don't tell anyone else about it."

"Thanks Aunt Minnie, I mean, Professor McGonagall."

“You’re welcome. I’ll add your memory to my evidence. I’d take this to the board of governors, except that Lucius Malfoy, who controls it, would be taking Snape’s side and threatening anybody who doesn’t agree with him.”

“We met his son,” said Harry.

-

As the week progressed, Harry and Hermione were at the top of every class they went to, impressing Flitwick and Sprout. Harry had trouble staying awake in History of Magic during the lecture, so he tuned it out and read the chapter Professor Binns was going over instead.

Defense Against the Dark Arts would’ve been a really great, fun, and interesting class were it not for one small factor – the teacher. Professor Quirrel, with his classroom smelling strongly of garlic and his fear whenever any topic related to defense was brought up. His stuttering didn’t help, nor did the awful smell emanating from his turban.

-

Harry was excited to have his first Transfiguration lesson with Aunt Minnie. He hadn’t known she was an animagus, so he was as surprised as everyone else when the cat turned into her. She immediately went into her lecture.

“Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts. Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned.”

Harry had never seen her more stern than while she was teaching. He knew even he wouldn’t be able to get away with anything in her class. He was glad to see the proud look she had when he turned his match into a needle a few moments before Hermione. She gave them five points each as she smiled at them both. No one else was able to get any reaction from their match.

On the way out the door he heard some Slytherins, who they shared the class with, muttering about 'teacher's pets,' until Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle actually walked up to them. "I'll bet Aunt Minnie showed you how to do that right before class started," said Draco.

"Actually," said Hermione, "Harry showed me how to do that spell on the train. He's already had years of magical education in America."

"It's none of your business anyway, Malfoy," said Harry. "Let's go Hermione!"

Together they turned their backs on Draco and started walking away until they heard him say, "Petrificus..." at which point Harry grabbed Hermione and pulled both of them out of the way, "...Totalus."

The spell hit a nearby statue as Harry summoned his wand out of its holster, and shouted, "Accio wands," causing all three wands to come into his left hand. "Harry!" shouted Minerva as she walked out to see him pointing four wands at three terrified Slytherins, "what's going on?"

"Your nephew stole our wands!"

"After you tried to petrify us from behind," said Hermione. "Draco's spell hit the statue after we dodged it."

"Which wand is Mr. Malfoy's?" asked Minerva.

After she'd seen that Draco's wand had performed the body-bind spell, he claimed, "He stole my wand and shot a spell at me."

"Professor McGonagall," said Harry, "Why don't we use your pensieve?"

Draco's eyes went wide at that suggestion. Minerva looked at him with her meanest look. "If you admit attacking them now, you lose ten points and get a detention. If I have to take my pensieve out and it's proven that you attacked them, you'll lose fifty points and get five detentions. It's up to you Mr. Malfoy."

His face turned red with anger, but he knew he was caught. "Fine! I did it, Aunt Minnie," and stormed off with his bodyguards.

McGonagall called after him, "Fifteen points from Slytherin and detention tonight at seven cleaning the bathrooms under Mr. Filch's supervision. I shall give your wands to Professor Snape tomorrow at breakfast."

"Harry," said Minerva after Malfoy was gone, "That was impressive summoning. I'm curious why you didn't use a defense spell on him."

"I figured he'd pretend to be hurt and I'd end up in trouble because of his daddy."

"Very good thinking, Harry. Five points to Ravenclaw."

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By the time Saturday came around, Harry and Hermione thought they'd waited long enough to talk about C.A.R.E. With Penny's help, they arranged for most of Ravenclaw to meet them in the common room at ten-thirty to discuss the issue.

Harry started out nervously, "Does anybody here not know what a house elf is?"

A few muggleborns raised their hands and the meeting went from there. Hermione explained what they'd found out about the origin of their enslavement. Many of the kids that owned elves were very surprised to find this out.

"But if it's a contract," said Cho, "surely there are some loopholes."

"Probably so," answered Hermione, "But we don't know where the contract is, so we don't know the exact wording. We searched both the Hogwarts library and Professor McGonagall's. We'll keep trying to find it when we can, but for now we'd like to focus on two goals."

Harry continued. "One is to inform people, and the other is to work for better treatment of elves." At this point they passed out brochures with wizard pictures of an elf being beaten (as well as information).

“My dad took these photos in Diagon Alley while we were shopping. The elf’s owner was shamelessly beating him in the middle of the street.”

“They’re treated worse than vermin,” said Hermione, “and nobody does anything about it!”

“What we want to do is form a community to advance the rights of elves,” said Harry.

Hermione pulled out ten C.A.R.E. badges. “Two sickles to join and you get the badges. The money goes for our literature.”

“Professor McGonagall said that if we got ten members, she’d sponsor us to be an official Hogwarts club,” said Harry, “Then we could have a small information booth in the Great Hall and notices in every common room.”

Padma was the first to buy a badge, followed by Penny, Cho, Michael, Terry, Anthony, Lisa Turpin, Marietta Edgecomb, Mandy Brocklehurst, and Roger Davies. Others joined as well, but that was the list they gave to Aunt Minnie.

By Sunday morning, half of Ravenclaw and a few members of other houses were wearing C.A.R.E. badges. Some of them even sent literature to their parents. Hermione got an idea to start a petition for the ministry to make house elf abuse illegal. Harry and Hermione were sitting at an information booth in the Great Hall when Malfoy walked up to them, flanked by his bodyguards, holding one of their pamphlets looking furious. Harry had some idea what Malfoy was mad about.

He muttered, “New Sparks,” to get his wand and then pointed it under the table. When Malfoy was close enough, Harry muttered, “Accio wands.”

They Slytherins didn’t even notice the wands flying out of their pockets and under the table as Draco shouted, “HOW DARE YOU SHOW PICTURES OF MY ELF!”

Harry and Hermione both acted completely surprised, and Hermione loudly said, "We had no idea your father was the monster beating a house elf senseless in the middle of Diagon Alley."

Forgetting where he was, Draco shouted, "How DARE you say anything about my father, you filthy mudblood!"

"Twenty points from Slytherin for using that word," shouted Flitwick from nearby.

Malfoy paled for a moment and sneered at Harry. "I challenge you to a wizard's duel tonight."

Harry smiled, knowing the coward would never really do that. "Sure, but I want it official and in front of the whole school. I'll see if Professor McGonagall can sponsor it."

Malfoy paled. "I-I a son-of-a-squib like you isn't worthy of a wizard's duel! I'll just set your booth on fire!" He sneered as he arrogantly reached for his wand.

Both Harry and Hermione burst out laughing at the look of horror and then comprehension on his face. "Professor Flitwick," called Harry, "could you come here for a moment?"

"Certainly," he said as he walked over.

Hermione said, "Draco has just threatened to burn down our booth, so we were wondering if you could hold his and his friends' wands for us until we're through here or he's leaving."

Flitwick seemed to think about it for a moment. "Considering what I heard him shout a minute ago, I believe you." He turned to the Slytherins. "May I have your wands?"

"Actually, we have them, Professor," said Harry. "I managed to summon them before they did any damage."

Flitwick was astonished. "You summoned them?"

"Yes," he said simply.

“Professor McGonagall informed me that you’ve had previous education but this is amazing.”

Draco interrupted. “We’re leaving now, professor. Can we have our wands back?”

“Yes. Just make sure you don’t use them against other students, especially Ravenclaws.” He handed them the wands and watched them leave.

Harry said to his head of house, “Americans tend to be lazy, and the summoning charm is a wonderful tool for lazy people. They made it a high priority. I learned it when I was eight. It was one of the hardest charms they taught, but it was well worth it in my opinion. I haven’t had to leave the couch to get the T.V. remote since then.”

“You are so lucky!” said Hermione with a grin.

“Amazing,” said Flitwick, “I wonder how much more advanced we could go if the ministry let us start teaching kids at a younger age. Carry on. I’ll see you later.” He then left his students.

Hermione then turned toward Harry with puppy dog eyes. “You have got to teach me that charm.”

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The next week, Harry and Hermione continued to study together and be at the top of their classes. Five first years asked them for help with their classes in one day. They were Padma and Anthony from Ravenclaw, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot from Hufflepuff, and Neville from Gryffindor (all of them were C.A.R.E. members already). They decided to set aside an hour in the library each day to meet as a group to help them with different classes (just the actual topics of the week – not working weeks ahead like Harry and Hermione were doing when it was just them studying).

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When it came time for their first flying lesson, all the first years showed up. Hermione was very nervous despite the fact that they’d

both read a few books on Quidditch and flying. Harry tried to calm her down to no avail. When Harry put his hand out and said, "Up!" his broom went straight into his hand. Hermione's did not. It simply rolled over on the ground like Padma's. Neville's didn't move at all.

Madam Hooch then showed them the proper way to grip the broom. Harry was amused when Madam Hooch told Malfoy he'd been doing it wrong for years. When everyone was about to start flying, Neville lost control of his broom. After a terrifying flight, he broke his wrist, and Madam Hooch escorted him to the hospital wing, warning everybody to stay on the ground. Malfoy took the opportunity to steal Neville's remembrall, which had fallen on the ground.

"Give it back, Malfoy," Harry shouted.

"Make me, McGonagall!" he said as he flew off on a broom.

Within a second, Harry's wand was in his hand. "Accio, remembrall!"

Draco was holding it so tightly that he was pulled with it and fell off his broom, which was five feet in the air, before letting go of the orb that flew straight into Harry's hand. After he moaned in pain, Crabbe and Goyle walked up to him, but looked completely unsure what to do. Hermione had wanted to help Draco, but Harry said, "He can't be hurt badly if he can moan like that. He's faking. Besides, you know what he'd call you if you tried to help."

At that moment, Madam Hooch walked in alone and immediately noticed Draco on the ground. Her face turned red. She was furious. She rushed toward him while shouting, "I TOLD YOU NOT TO USE THE BROOMS! You are not getting another flying lesson in this school, you have a detention polishing all of these brooms once Madam Pomfrey says you're alright, and I'm going to recommend that you are never allowed a broom, along with a lifetime Quidditch ban, just in case you decide you want to play!"

The rest of the class started laughing as Draco limped out of there, apparently with a sprained ankle, next to Madam Hooch.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 3 – Secrets Revealed

When Madam Hooch finally returned, she said, “I know that half our time is up, but if we can avoid anymore foolishness or accidents, I can still teach you the basics of flying. Line up again and get your brooms. Quickly now!”

They all scrambled back to where they’d been and mounted their brooms under Hooch’s instructions. Harry soon found that he was a complete natural on a broom and was laughing, purely enjoying himself, as he out-flew everyone there. After five minutes, he noticed that Hermione was having trouble. She was off the ground, but not moving much at all, and was clearly terrified of falling. Madam Hooch was helping someone else. He flew over to his friend.

“Hermione, how are you doing?”

She put her head in shame. “I-I’m fine. Y-you’re doing r-really well.”

“Thanks. I want to help. What precisely is the problem you’re having? You’re brilliant at everything else.”

“I j-just can’t control this broom! There’s no spell or something I can learn to help.”

Nodding his head, Harry said, “You’re right. There’s nothing to memorize to make this easier. I was lucky. Apparently I’m good at this naturally.” He searched his mind to think of a way to help his friend. “Um, I guess it’s like riding a bike. There’s no book that can teach you how to do that either.”

“I had a hard time learning that, too,” she admitted, “but I did learn,” she said with determination.

Harry smiled. “And you’ll learn this, too. The first thing you need to do is...”

Harry patiently instructed Hermione in flying, explaining how he was controlling the broom he was on, and having her watch while he demonstrated what he somehow knew instinctively. Unbeknownst to

them, Madam Hooch had noticed and was watching them when she wasn't correcting others who were having minor problems.

After about twenty minutes, Hermione was flying fairly well, and beginning to enjoy herself. "Wow! I never thought that this could be such fun!"

Harry chuckled, "I thought so. My parents wouldn't let me get a broom, but I saw a few Quidditch matches in the States and thought it looked exciting. I definitely want to try out for the Quidditch team next year!"

"And I'm sure you'll do well," said Madam Hooch, who'd flown up to them. "Mr. McGonagall, I'd like to compliment how well you instructed Miss Granger. I couldn't have done it better myself. Five points to Ravenclaw."

"Thank you," he said blushing slightly.

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That night, Harry pulled out his mirror to call his family once the common room was cleared out.

"You are gonna have to get me a broom next year!" he declared excitedly to his parents. "We just had our first flying lesson and it was awesome!"

Mark chuckled. "Let me guess. You plan to be captain of the Ravenclaw Quidditch team next year, too?"

Harry's ears turned pink. "I do want to try out for the team. Isn't there a place in Little Salem where people can practice flying and Quidditch?"

"Yes, I think so," said Cindy. "Er, 'Frank's Flying Funhouse,' I think is the name. We can certainly find out about it before you return for the summer."

"How did your girlfriend fly?" asked Brianna.

Harry's ears turned pink, but he firmly answered, "I don't have a girlfriend!"

"You know who I mean," his sister replied, grinning.

"Don't tease your brother," said Cindy sternly.

Mark added, "Or we might tell him about Bobby." Brianna's face went scarlet. "Whoops!" he said in mock regret.

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "Who's Bobby?"

"Just a boy in my class who moved from Michigan this summer. We did our homework together, ONCE!"

"Magic or Muggle?"

"Muggle, and don't start..."

"Well, then if your new boyfriend gets out of line, you can stun him and he won't be able to defend himself."

"He is not..."

"We'll see about that. What does he look like?"

"This is not about Bobby! How did Hermione fly?"

"On a broom. How tall is Bobby?"

"Dad, why did you have to bring him up?" Mark simply laughed.

"Does he carry your books?" asked Harry, clearly enjoying his revenge.

"No, he doesn't!"

"Then you should let him know that boyfriends do that kind of thing."

"He is NOT my boyfriend! Do you carry Hermione's books for her?"

"Of course not, but she's not my girlfriend."

“But you did buy her an enchanted book-bag for her birthday,” said Brianna with a smirk. “Same difference!”

Cindy decided to change the subject. “Matt, Emilio, and Chris said ‘hi’ when we ran into them at the mall last week.”

“They said school’s not quite the same without having you there to help prank the teachers,” said Brianna.

Harry smiled. “Yeah. I wish they were here to help me prank...”

“Harry!” said his mother sternly.

“I mean to study with.”

“But then one of them would try to steal your girlfriend!” Brianna teased.

Harry replied, “Maybe I can get them to follow you and Bobby around. They can use their squirt guns on you two when they see you kissing.”

“Ewww! I am not gonna kiss Bobby!”

“Not with anyone watching, anyway,” answered Harry laughing.

-

The next day at breakfast, Draco (with his bodyguards) strutted up to the Ravenclaw table and said with his sneer, “McGonagall! I thought you’d like to know that Hooch’s punishment was over-ridden. My father...”

“The coward who beats house elves,” interjected Hermione with a smirk.

Draco’s ears turned pink. “How DARE you say that about my father, you filthy mudblood!” Crabbe and Goyle both laughed stupidly as though Draco had said something clever.

“You brought that filthy elf-beater up!” said Harry angrily. “He, just like you, struts around like he’s important because of something he had

no control over; when in reality he's nothing more than a bully and a bigot!"

"How dare you!"

"If you don't want us to insult you and your pathetic family of self-important nothings, go back to the Slytherin table where you belong!" said Hermione.

"I was just saying that in fourth year I'll be able to join the Slytherin quidditch team."

"Well big deal," said Harry, "I'll just summon you off your broom again when you're higher off the ground."

Draco's face went pale. "You will not!" he said, turning around and stomping off.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and laughed. "He actually thinks I care that he calls me a mudblood," said Hermione.

"Apparently some purebloods are too stupid to realize that no one of intelligence believes that nonsense. I mean, look at Crap and Boil, I mean Crabbe and Goyle." Hermione giggled at Harry's little joke. "They are the stupidest, least magical kids in our class, and they're purebloods."

"Draco didn't say anything about his detention," said Hermione thoughtfully.

Harry grinned. "I'd say that means he still has to polish those old brooms."

-

The next Potions lesson that they had, Snape wasn't specifically targeting Harry. He picked a different target this time.

"Miss Granger, why must you insist on being an insufferable know-it-all? Fifteen points from Ravenclaw!"

“But all she did was answer the question you asked!” yelled Harry.

“Twenty points from Ravenclaw, Mr. McGonagall.” He then turned back to Hermione. “Miss Granger, you have not answered my question. Why must you be such a know-it-all?”

Looking down at her desk, she muttered, “I simply answer the questions you ask, Professor.”

“Look me in the eye when you speak to me. Five points from Ravenclaw.”

“No sir,” Hermione answered coldly.

“What? Twenty points from Ravenclaw! How dare you refuse?”

“I don’t want you performing Legilimency on me like you’ve tried doing to Harry, sir,” she said firmly, earning the attention of the class. The Ravenclaws already knew what he did, but the Hufflepuffs who didn’t gasped.

“I do not,” he said unconvincingly, then with a cold expression on his face he added, “But if I did, do you have something to hide?”

Hermione was furious, as she refused to look up at the ‘teacher.’ “I’m not breaking any school rules, if that’s what you mean, but I don’t want you reading my mind like you do everyone else’s. That’s an invasion of privacy!” People started murmuring in class at this pronouncement, and she shouted for the class, “Whenever you look him in the eye he reads your minds.”

“You have just earned yourself a detention, Miss Granger.”

“Fine,” she said coldly as she got up and left the room, making sure to not look at Snape. Harry got up angrily and followed her.

“You’ve also earned a detention, Mr. McGonagall!” As Snape looked around the room, he noticed that no one in class would look up toward him as the door slammed shut.

“Hermione wait up!” said Harry.

“You shouldn’t have followed me, Harry,” she said while stopping.

“He targeted you because he can’t get me.”

“Your aunt has to teach me Occlumency! I can’t stand the thought of that greasy git in my head. It’s disgusting, and I know for a fact that it’s illegal!”

“Then let’s see her. We should also talk to Flitwick about this, since he’s our head of house.”

-

A few minutes later, they found themselves outside of Professor McGonagall’s classroom while she was teaching. They were surprised to hear her say loudly, “Mr. McGonagall, Miss Granger, there’s no point in waiting out in the hall. Go into my office and I’ll see you in about ten minutes.”

They walked into the room, both blushing slightly as they made their way to her office door. They heard some slight chuckling from the students. They hurried into the office and shut the door.

-

Nine minutes later, Minerva came into the room to find the two kids sitting down silently. “Now, why don’t you tell me what Snape has done this time?”

“You may want to call Professor Flitwick as well,” said Harry. “Snape gave us both detentions.”

After Flitwick had been called, and they’d both watched the memory of the last five minutes they’d spent with Snape, Flitwick was furious. “Snape uses Legilimency on students and Dumbledore knows about it? Why hasn’t he been fired?”

At that moment, Snape and Dumbledore walked into the office. Severus sneered, "I suspected that Mr. McGonagall would go running to his auntie for help. How touching."

"Against a pathetic bully like you," shouted Minerva, whose face was red with fury, "all the students need help!"

"Now, now," said Dumbledore benevolently, "I'm sure we can find a peaceful solution to this minor disagreement."

Flitwick shouted, "This...teacher performs Legilimency on the students!"

"Only to insure the safety of the school," Snape said coldly.

"You see," said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. "It's not that he wants to invade the privacy of the students, but he feels that it's his responsibility to make sure they're not planning anything dangerous."

"Poppycock!" said Minerva angrily. "Professor Dumbledore, I know that you don't care at all about the students but..."

"Don't you DARE accuse me of not caring about the students! I..."

"Subject them to this monster who makes sure that no one but Slytherins can learn Potions and constantly invades their privacy! Subject them to a Divination teacher who not only is a fraud but enjoys terrorizing them by predicting one of them to die every year! Not to mention..."

"That's enough, Minerva! We can't have students walking out in the middle of class. The detentions will be served with Mr. Filch, but the house points will be restored. Professor Snape, please cease attempting Legilimency on Mr. McGonagall and Miss Granger."

At that moment, Harry felt a subtle mental attack, but Snape wasn't looking at him. He pushed the attack away with all his might, and Professor Dumbledore stumbled backwards, clearly surprised.

Harry was furious, but before he could say anything, Professor McGonagall shouted, "Albus! I'm surprised at you! It's bad enough

that you condone Snape's behavior, but to do it yourself! I'm glad I taught Harry Occlumency! I wonder how many students' minds the two of you assault every year!"

"If there's nothing more," said Dumbledore, whose ears were now pink, "we'll be going. It's almost time for lunch."

Dumbledore and Snape quickly left the room, leaving the others alone. Flitwick was beside himself. "They both read students' minds and think that there's nothing wrong with it!"

Minerva sighed sadly. "I wonder if it was a good idea to have Harry come here at all. There are other schools in America he could have..."

"But I wouldn't have you to talk to Aunt Minnie, or Hermione."

The brown-haired girl blushed but spoke up. "Professor McGonagall, I was wondering if you would teach me Occlumency. I believe that I'll need it."

"Of course, Miss Granger," said the head of Gryffindor. "Let me get you a book to read. Once you've read it, let me know and we'll start lessons."

-

As Harry and Hermione were walking toward the Great Hall, Hermione stopped and angrily said, "I can't believe that Snape is getting away with this! And we got detentions!" She clenched her fists in frustration. "I wish there was something we could do about it!"

"Maybe there is," said Harry mysteriously as a smile appeared on his face. "We'll talk about it in the common room later, not where we can be overheard."

-

By dinnertime, Hermione's pronouncement that Snape was reading the mind of anyone who looked him in the eyes had spread all over

the school. People from different houses came up to Harry and Hermione to ask about it. They answered the questions truthfully.

When dinner was finally over, Harry and Hermione reported to Filch, who had them scrubbing floors for three hours. Half an hour after they were released, they found themselves sitting alone in a corner of Ravenclaw Tower. Most of the students had gone to bed already. Harry whispered, "I think we should pull a prank on Snape."

At first she looked shocked, but then a small smile started forming on her lips. "I hope you don't get us both expelled. What's your idea?"

Harry grinned at his friend. "Well, I was thinking that Snape probably protects himself from pranks, because I'm sure every non-Slytherin in the school hates him."

"Someone probably tries to prank him every day," said Hermione thoughtfully, "So why will we be successful?"

"Because we'll base them on his routine, just like me and my American friends used to do."

"It can't happen while we're in the classroom though," said Hermione with a worried expression on her face.

Harry grinned. "Then we'll need to get the memory of someone who is in the class so we can watch."

"Definitely," she said smugly.

"We'll need to sneak out after curfew to do it, though."

She leaned forward conspiratorially. "What is it exactly that you want to do?"

-

At about midnight, the portrait of 'Al' was opened and two students wearing school robes that clearly had their house badges covered with black cloth snuck out the door to Ravenclaw Tower. Their hoods

were up so that it was difficult to see their faces. One of them closed the door, carefully avoiding waking the portrait up.

The short figures silently moved through the castle. Their shoes had been charmed silent. As they approached the staircases, Harry whispered, "I wish we could have brooms."

"Well, we can't," his partner in crime responded. "I wish we had an invisibility cloak, but don't have one of those either."

"That would be awesome," he whispered as they waited in the shadows for the stairs to move to the right position, narrowly avoiding being noticed by the Bloody Baron. "Maybe we can learn how to disillusion ourselves." When the stairs were in the right position, they soundlessly made their way down them quickly.

They slowly and carefully made their way through the castle, with one of them getting on the floor and peeking around each corner. They ducked into several classrooms on false alarms, learning about the thrill and fear of sneaking around Hogwarts after hours.

When they finally reached Snape's classroom, Harry performed the 'alohamora' spell, and nothing happened. "Fine," muttered Harry, who stuck the end of his wand under the door and summoned the hinges. After Hermione performed a silencing charm on the door (just in case they dropped it), they carefully opened it and replaced the hinges, leaving it slightly ajar to make sure they weren't trapped inside the classroom if the door locked. They then pulled a few items out of their pockets and set up their prank.

Less than fifteen minutes after they got to the door, they were leaving. Harry closed it, and found that it did lock itself. As soon as they got around the corner, they heard someone approaching the classroom from the other direction. They didn't stop to see who it was, but they both heard Snape's voice laughing, saying something about stupid kids thinking that a simple unlocking spell would break into his classroom.

So they snuck back through the castle much the same way that they had to get to the dungeons. When they approached a certain stairway though, it was already in the correct position, so they got on.

Unfortunately, when they were halfway up the staircase, it started moving again. While it was moving, they noticed Peeves turn a corner toward their general direction, so they ducked down so he didn't spot them. When the stairs finally stopped moving, they snuck up to wherever they stopped, not noticing that it led them toward the forbidden third floor corridor.

"Where are we?" whispered Harry.

"In trouble," Hermione said, pointing to the right, where a certain cat was looking at them.

"Mrs. Norris," Harry said as the cat ran off.

"Where Mrs. Norris is," said Hermione.

"Filch is not far behind. Come on!"

They ran down the corridor until they slammed into a door. They heard footsteps coming and the voice of Mr. Filch saying, "What is it, Mr. Norris?"

Harry tried the locked door, and Hermione magically unlocked it. They quickly got inside and closed the door softly behind them.

"What is it, girl?" Filch said on the other side of the door. "There are no students here. I'll bet you can sense what's on the other side of this door. Don't worry. It won't get you. Come on."

While Harry and Hermione were listening to that exchange, they were looking straight into the eyes of a monstrous dog. Specifically, Harry was looking at one set of eyes, and Hermione was looking at another set. There was a third set as well, but neither was staring at that set as the formerly sleeping three-headed dog stretched out its legs as it glared at them. When the thunderous growls began, Harry grabbed the door and pulled it open, preferring detention or even expulsion to becoming a chew-toy for a three-headed dog.

Luckily, Filch had already left, so they slowly and carefully made their way back to the staircases.

As they were walking, they whispered back and forth.

“What was that thing, Hermione?”

“I don’t know, but it was obviously guarding something.”

“You saw the trap door, too.”

“Naturally.”

“I don’t care what it’s guarding; they shouldn’t have a thing like that inside a school! It could kill someone.”

“It was behind a locked door,” defended Hermione.

“That anyone who knows ‘alohamora’ can get past.”

“Good point.”

“Thank you.”

At about this time, they’d gotten past a staircase and heard two sets of footsteps behind them. They heard a male voice say, “Stop, you there!” and ran for it, but no matter where they turned they couldn’t seem to shake off their pursuers.

“Hermione,” Harry panted, “Let’s split up. I’ll try to give you cover.”

“You can’t! We’re in this together!”

“Both of us getting in trouble won’t help any. Be careful. I’ll meet you at the tower. Now go!” Reluctantly, she ran off quietly in the direction Harry indicated, while he went the other way, purposely making noise. He was happy to hear that both were following him as he tried to find a way to lose whoever was following him. Finally, he came to a dead end.

As he saw the two figures approaching him, he realized that they were definitely students, and appeared to be too young to even be prefects. He wondered what they wanted as one of them put a piece of parchment into his pocket. As they came closer, he saw that it was a set of twins with red hair. If he remembered correctly, they had

been looking at a tarantula on the train, and were Gryffindors. Their wands were pointed at him.

“What do you want?”

“To introduce ourselves, of course.”

“I’m Gred Weasley.”

“And I’m Forge.”

“The question my friend is…”

“...who are you?”

“I, I’m Harry,” he said nervously, not knowing what was going on, “Harry McGonagall.”

The twins looked at each other with mock sorrow on their faces. “Isn’t it terrible, Gred, how kids these days…”

“...can lie so easily? Yes, Forge, it is a shame.”

“I’m not lying! I am Harry McGonagall! Harry Mark McGonagall if you must know!”

“We agree that your first name is Harry.”

“But your middle name is James.”

“And your last name is Potter.”

Harry’s face fell. He couldn’t understand how they knew. If they read his mind, they were the most gifted Legilimens in the world because he didn’t even feel it. “I am not!” he decided to lie.

“Oh, but you are.”

“Now tell us why you’re here and what happened to your scar and hair.”

Realizing that they weren't going to be fooled, he decided to find out how they knew and who else knew. "Fine, but not in the middle of a corridor."

Fred and George smiled. "Very well, walk ahead of us."

After they'd directed Harry at wandpoint into a secret passage, one of them said, "Okay Harry Potter, how did you become a McGonagall?"

"Are you using Polyjuice Potion?"

Harry first wanted answers. "I'll answer your questions if you'll answer mine. How do you know who I am, and does anybody else?"

"I don't think that's a good idea for us to answer," said Fred.

"Considering that some people believe you're a dark wizard,"

"And we've found you impersonating our head of house's nephew."

"How long did it take for you to convince the hat to put you in Ravenclaw..."

"...Instead of Slytherin?"

Harry was getting intimidated by the way they could complete each other's sentences. "I am not a dark wizard! I was adopted by Professor McGonagall's nephew right after my birth-parents were killed and I was raised in America. I only found out that I'm Harry Potter last year. And the hat wanted to put me in Gryffindor!"

"So you're saying that Dumbledore lied to everyone when he said you'd gone missing."

Harry's ears turned pink. "Not exactly. He left me on the doorstep of my only living relatives with a note. Aunt Minnie, I mean Professor McGonagall had watched them all day and thought they were the worst sort of muggles imaginable, while Dumbledore didn't even bother to meet them. She, my parents, and my sister are the only people who know about it."

The twins looked at each other as though to mentally confer. Harry saw his chance. He muttered, "New Sparks...Accio wands!"

Both twins felt their wands pulled away. They tried to hold on, but it was no use. Within a moment, Harry had their wands.

"That was fast."

"Looks like you've been trained by someone."

"Where'd your wand come from?"

Harry looked at them, exasperated. "All I did is take your wands. It's not like I crucio'd you. I answered your questions, now answer mine."

For the first time in history, Fred and George Weasley were silent.

Harry took a deep breath. "Okay, I understand. You think I'm a dark wizard, so you're not answering me, figuring that I might kill you once you do."

"Basically," they said together.

He knew he had to gain their trust. "How about this? Here are your wands back, mine too (he still had his second wand hidden if this didn't work). All I ask is that you march me to Professor McGonagall and no one else.

As they took the three wands, the twins looked at each other again. One finally spoke. "Well he did..."

"But what if..."

"Why was he..."

"Harry, why were you and Hermione Granger out in the corridors at night?"

"You seem a bit young for snogging."

"We were pranking Snape's classroom," he said proudly. He'd heard of their reputation.

“How’d you get in his door?” said Fred, challenging Harry.

“I stuck my wand underneath and summoned the hinges when alohamora didn’t work.”

“Summoning the hinges,” the twins said together as matching grins appeared on their faces.

“The prank we set up should happen during your class. You are third years, right?”

“Yes, and we share Potions class with the Ravenclaws tomorrow.”

“Pretty clever to not have it happen on a day you have Potions.”

“So, do you believe me?”

“For now,” said one of them.

“Will you keep my secret?”

“For now,” said the other one.

“Then I’ll need you to talk to my aunt privately tomorrow and tell her you know who I am. Then ask her to teach you Occlumency. Oh, and don’t look Snape or Dumbledore in the eye until she says you can.”

“He’s serious.”

“He wants us to tell McGonagall.”

“It’s been long enough for Polyjuice Potion to wear off.”

“And he hasn’t drunk anything.”

“But we don’t need Occlumency lessons.”

“We taught ourselves in first year once we realized that Snape and Dumbledore can read minds.”

“We’d have never gotten away with anything if we didn’t.” They handed Harry his wand back, and he put it in the holster.

“Wicked,” they said together.

“An invisible holster.”

“I’ve heard of those.”

“They also repel summoning charms, don’t they?”

“Yep,” said Harry smugly. His face turned serious again. “You really should talk to my aunt to set your minds at ease if you have any doubts. I’m here to get an education and pull pranks the same as everybody else. I just don’t want Dumbledore to take me away from my family.”

“We understand, mate.”

“But we’re not telling McGonagall we know about you.”

“Because she’d be trying to figure out how.”

“You still haven’t answered my questions,” said Harry.

Harry looked at twin smiles. “We are the only ones who know about you.”

“But we’re not telling you how.”

“But we will show you one thing you might be interested in.”

“As one of the founders of C.A.R.E. we thought you might want to see where the house elves here are.”

“You’re gonna show me the kitchens?” asked Harry excitedly.

“Exactly, and then we’ll help you back to Ravenclaw Tower.”

-

About an hour later, Harry happily snuck into Ravenclaw Tower, his wand in his left hand, to find a lone bushy-haired girl sitting in one of the chairs looking terribly frightened. She looked up at the noise, put

down her Occlumency book, and rushed to him, embracing him tightly.

“Oh Harry, I was so worried. What with that dog in one corridor, I wondered what else was in this castle. Are you all right? Were you caught? Are you in trouble?” She said all this quickly without taking a breath.

Harry smiled widely. “Thanks for caring. I am fine. The people chasing us caught me, and they turned out to be Fred and George Weasley. They found out...” Harry shook his head, frustrated with himself, “I mean, they offered to show me where the kitchen is so I could meet the house elves. I would’ve gotten you if I could, but I didn’t have time. Anyway, I learned the way into the kitchens.”

Hermione’s face turned pink. “So you’ve been having a midnight snack while I’ve been worried sick? I...”

“Calm down, Hermione. I’m sorry that you were worried. I really am. I brought you something.” He then put his wand back in his right hand and flicked it, muttering an incantation. A tray of food floated from the floor near the entrance onto a table. It had a plate with a sandwich and a pumpkin pasty and two glasses of pumpkin juice. “I already ate, so the food is yours,” he said, taking one of the glasses of pumpkin juice.

She smiled shyly. “Thank you, but you’re just gonna watch me eat?”

“Why not?” he said chuckling, “I’ve seen you do it before. By the way, I told the twins about our prank, and they volunteered to let us borrow one of their memories to watch. We’ll simply tell Aunt Minnie that we want to watch it, not that we did it.”

Hermione looked worried. “But she’ll suspect, won’t she?”

Harry snorted. “To turn someone in for pranking that git, she’d have to have two witnesses, a confession, and irrefutable evidence, not suspicions. She’ll probably watch it with us.”

Hermione laughed at that statement. “But what did the Weasley twins find out?”

Harry's face turned visibly pale. "I...slip of the tongue. Nothing."

She gave him a strange look, and then smiled again. "Thanks for the snack."

-

The next day at lunch, when Harry and Hermione showed up in the Great Hall, Snape wasn't there. When Hermione pointed that out, both of them laughed. They sat down next to the other first years. While they were laughing, the Weasley twins stepped up to their table. Fred was holding a capped vial. They both appeared to be in a very good mood.

"Hello Harry, Hermione, and the rest of you young Ravenclaws. You missed the best Potions lesson we've had in all the time we've been here," said Fred.

"But we have a copy of the memory to share with you," said George.

Fred handed Harry the capped vial. "Here you go Mr. McGonagall." Fred winked as Harry took it.

"Thanks," said Hermione.

"No problem. We've got to be off to Gryffindor Table."

"What was that all about?" asked Padma.

Harry chuckled. "Someone pulled a prank on Snape during their class."

"They know how much we hate Snape," added Hermione.

"So they thought we'd enjoy watching him humiliated in Professor McGonagall's pensieve."

"Will your aunt really let you watch that?" asked Michael Corner.

"Let us?" asked Harry, faking offense, "She'll probably join us."

“Can we watch, too?” asked Padma as the rest of the first years nodded eagerly.

Harry chuckled. “I can ask her after class today, but no promises.”

-

After lunch was over, they went straight to Transfiguration class, where they had a productive lesson. Harry and Hermione were still at the top of the class. When it was over, Harry walked up to his aunt’s desk while the other Ravenclaw first-years stayed outside by the door.

“Professor McGonagall,” Harry said with a grin.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Did you hear about something happening to Professor Snape during a third year class this morning?”

He could see his aunt desperately holding back laughter. “Yes I did.”

“One of the students provided me with the memory,” he said, showing her the vial, “and I was wondering if you’d allow me to watch it. Perhaps join me.”

She looked around as though expecting Dumbledore to be in the classroom. With her most stern expression, Minerva said, “I suppose that as Deputy Headmistress I should investigate the matter for the sake of school safety. You may accompany me during my investigation.”

“May the rest of the first year Ravenclaws join us in this investigation as well?” Harry said with a straight face.

Still holding her stern face, she said, “I believe that would be appropriate. Have them accompany you here after dinner.”

-

From the time Harry left the classroom giving his friends the ‘thumbs-up’ the day passed slowly as anticipation grew. Harry was

disappointed to see that Snape was fully recovered and in attendance at dinner, although his hair was much shorter than usual. As soon as the meal was over, the first-year Ravenclaws marched straight to McGonagall's office.

With her teaching face on, Aunt Minnie said, "You realize of course that this is an investigation to prevent further incidents like this from happening." At this point, all the kids burst out laughing, followed by the professor. Finally, the memory was placed in the pensieve. "Now, everybody hold hands as we enter."

-

The group found themselves in the Potions classroom. About half of the students, including Fred and George Weasley, were already there. Harry and Hermione led the group to watch Professor Snape as he picked up his attendance sheet. While he was holding it, the parchment transfigured into some sort of green slime that dripped from his hand. Some fell on his desk, some on the floor, and some up his right sleeve.

He looked venomous as he glared at Fred and George, who were laughing along with most of the class. He calmly said, "So, you two think it is funny to ruin an attendance sheet, not to mention befouling the room with this filth! Twenty points from Gryffindor, and you both have a detention cleaning this room from top to bottom. Now, for your assignment."

He pointed his wand at the board, but instead of showing the instructions, his wand was summoned right out of his hands to the chalkboard, causing more laughter. Although his ears were pink, Snape was still speaking calmly as he took forty more points from Fred and George. He angrily walked toward the board where his wand was stuck until he fell over face first into a puddle of ketchup. He got up in the midst of the laughter to see that muggle fishing line had been tied tightly two inches above the ground. That's what he tripped on. "Eighty points from Gryffindor," he growled, "and Mr.'s Weasley, you will have detention for a week."

"But we didn't do it!"

“Although we wish we had!”

“Twenty points for your cheek, and another day’s detention for both of you!” He walked over to his cabinet to retrieve a towel, only to find it locked. He picked up a Ravenclaw student’s wand and pointed it at the cabinet. “Alohamora.” The cabinet opened and a few select potions flew out at Snape, as though summoned. The towel stayed where it was.

An uncapped beaker with a dark green liquid hit his head, spilling all over his greasy hair, which started turning gray and falling off. Another potion hit his robes and turned them all hot pink. Snape was now bald, wearing all hot pink, and his face was full of ketchup. He angrily walked over to the cabinet and grabbed the only towel there, wiping the ketchup off his face. When he removed the towel, the ketchup was gone, but where it had been, his skin was now pastel green. “One hundred points from Gryffindor! Class dismissed!” he screamed through the laughter.

Soon the group of Ravenclaws found themselves sucked out of the memory, laughing hysterically. McGonagall said, “Two hundred twenty points to Gryffindor, since it hasn’t been proven who the culprits are,” in between snorts of laughter. “And I’ll see about those detentions he gave the Weasleys, once I regain my composure.” Although Gryffindor points didn’t matter much to the group of Ravenclaws, they could see how unfair Snape was being, so they understood. Harry and Hermione were hoping Fred and George wouldn’t have to serve the detentions.

-

Harry could see Brianna almost started hyperventilating when he described the prank he and Hermione had pulled on Snape (through their mirrors). Since it was just them talking, he admitted that they were the culprits. They’d come to an agreement. She didn’t tease Harry about Hermione and Harry won’t tease her about Bobby.

“And the jerk still has no idea it was you?” she asked, still laughing.

"No," said Harry, who was starting to laugh with her, "He's convinced that it was Fred and George, but couldn't give them detentions because he couldn't prove it."

"That's good!"

"Yeah, I found out that they're pretty good blokes after they found out my little secret."

"What secret?" asked Hermione from the girls' staircase. Harry looked at her in surprise. She was holding a thick book in her hands. "I couldn't sleep, so I came up to read for a while. I wasn't spying on you."

"Nothing," said Harry while Brianna fell silent. "Just guy stuff. Do you want to say hello to Brianna?"

Hermione looked either slightly hurt or slightly angry for a moment, but then said, "Sure," and walked over to the mirror Harry was holding. "Hello, Brianna. How are your schools going?"

"Great," said Brianna happily, "I'm still at the top of all my classes."

"That's wonderful. What's this I hear about a boy named Bobby?"

-

A few days later was Hermione's birthday. Harry had arranged for their study group for September nineteenth to throw a surprise birthday party instead. In the morning, Harry gave no indication that he knew it was Hermione's birthday. He saw her look of disappointment, but she didn't say anything.

As they got out of their last class, Harry said, "We have a few minutes before dinner. I'd like to get out of the castle for a little while. Want to take a walk around the grounds?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Er, I suppose so."

Together they walked out the entrance hall while Harry indirectly led them to a spot Padma had picked out. As they walked up to their

study group, Hermione saw a picnic blanket, a basket, and a few pitchers of pumpkin juice. She also saw that everyone still had their book bags.

“Well,” said Harry with a grin, “What do we have here?”

“SURPRISE!” shouted Neville, Padma, Hannah, Susan, and Anthony.

Harry said, “Happy birthday, Hermione.”

The girl looked close to tears. She grabbed Harry and pulled him into a hug. “Thank you!” She then went to each of them, doing the same.

The picnic basket was enchanted for size, so they were able to pull out dinner, as well as a cake, before it was time for presents. Each of them removed their gift from their school bag. Hermione looked so happy as she carefully removed the wrapping paper from her presents. She got a set of fancy quills from Neville. Anthony gave her a set of inks. Padma gave her a magical diary with a lock that only the writer could open. Susan gave her a small purse. She opened Harry’s present last to find that it was a bottomless, weightless book bag like he had with her name monogrammed on it. She hugged Harry again and kissed him on the cheek, causing them both to blush.

Before they left, she thanked them all for coming, and of course for their gifts. A few hours later, while they were studying in their common room, Hermione admitted to Harry that the only people that had ever celebrated her birthday were family.

“Speaking of which,” said Harry as he pulled out his mirror, “It should be just about time.” At that moment, his mirror received a call, so he answered it, making sure Hermione could see as his mom, dad, and sister sang ‘Happy Birthday’ to her.

-

Harry took Hermione to the kitchens that Saturday to introduce her to the elves, who they asked about the House Elf Enslavement Contract.

“We is knowing about the contract, Miss Grangy,” said Dotty, the elf they were speaking too, “but we isn’t knowing where it is.”

Hermione said, "We're part of a group that's interested in the welfare of elves. I'd like to know if you're happy here."

"OH YES! Hogwarts is being the happiest place for house elves to work!"

"I'm glad to hear it," Hermione said. "How do elves like you feel about the way some masters hurt their elves?" She then showed them their brochure with the picture.

"Them is bad masters, but bad master be better than no master."

"We're trying to find a way to make this kind of treatment illegal," said Harry diplomatically. Based off of the reaction of Blinky, his aunt's elf, to the idea of freedom, Hermione agreed with Harry not to rush the elves into accepting the idea of freedom. For now the goal was to provide them a happy life. "People like that are unworthy of the wonderful help that house elves provide."

"Elves is happiest with a worthy master," agreed Dotty.

-

The weeks passed by pretty quickly after that. No student besides Harry, Fred, and George would look Snape in the eye, and every book the library had that even mentioned Occlumency or Legilimency had been checked out.

The study group was going well, and the students Harry and Hermione were helping were improving quite a bit, as Professor Flitwick pointed out to them after one Charms class, where the only kids who'd made a feather levitate were the ones in Harry and Hermione's group. He awarded them thirty points. Neville seemed to be improving the most under their tutoring, gaining confidence that he didn't have before. It soon became obvious that he had an aptitude for Herbology, but did abysmally in Potions. It seemed that Neville was the Gryffindor first-year Snape had chosen to pick on. Padma did well in Transfiguration, but had trouble in Charms. The others hadn't found their best subject yet, and were hoping it would be one of the elective classes they'd take in third year.

Harry and Hermione were a month ahead in assignments, and already had read all the way through their books for the entire year. They figured that at the rate they were going, they wouldn't have any assignments to do for the last two months of school. They each planned on purchasing the next year's books during Christmas break. Hermione, who'd worked extremely hard at it, had mastered Occlumency a week before Halloween. Harry thought about telling her his true identity, but decided against it for the time being. It was bad enough that the twins knew, and he wanted as few people as possible knowing the truth about him.

-

On Halloween afternoon, during Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Professor Quirrel was teaching and turned around to get a cage that contained a dark creature they were studying. The moment the back of Quirrel's turban faced Harry, he involuntarily reached for his forehead as he winced in pain.

"What's wrong Harry?" whispered Hermione, who was sitting next to him.

"I don't know."

Hermione looked at her friend in concern. "This isn't the first time that's happened. Where exactly does it hurt?"

He ran his finger in the shape of a slash down his forehead and Hermione's eyes went wide. She stared at Harry for a few moments before looking straight ahead, ignoring his attempts to get her attention. Quirrel turned around and continued the lesson.

Once class was over, Harry took her by the arm and pulled her into a nearby empty classroom. "What's wrong?"

Hermione looked very concerned. She started muttering more to herself than Harry. "The scar? Harry? You had to learn Occlumency. You have an inheritance you don't want to talk about. You have green eyes. Fred and George found out...your little secret." A terrified expression came across her face as she backed away from her best friend. "You're Harry Potter!"

Harry was shocked that she'd realized this. "Let me explain, Hermione!" Harry stepped toward her.

"Stay away from me, you, you LIAR!" She then ran off, and Harry could hear her crying before she'd left the room.

He didn't know what to do. He was afraid that if he followed her, she'd start shouting at him and someone would overhear. He was also afraid of losing his friend. He took off after her until she stopped, turned around, and pointed her wand in his face.

"Don't follow me, Harry!"

'Well,' he thought to himself, 'that answers that.'

-

Harry sat miserably at the Halloween Feast next to Padma, very much aware that Hermione was nowhere to be found. "Have you seen Hermione?" he asked.

She looked very uncomfortable. "Er, yes, but she told me not to tell you where she is." She took a deep breath. "She's, er, mad at you about something, but she wouldn't say what."

Harry was relieved that she wasn't blabbing it to everyone, but he wanted to get his friend back. He nodded miserably. "I need to apologize to her for something, and she won't let me."

"I'm sure she'll forgive you for whatever it is. She probably just needs some time alone."

He gave Padma a small smile and fixed a plate of food for himself and tried to enjoy the feast. Just when he was feeling a little better, Professor Quirrel showed up in the middle of the feast and shouted, "Troll – in the dungeons – thought you ought to know," before fainting.

Less than thirty seconds later, Penny Clearwater, while hastily making a headcount, was leading them toward Ravenclaw Tower. Harry stopped suddenly to talk to Padma, who was right behind him.

“Where’s Hermione? She doesn’t know about the troll!”

A look of horror came upon her face. “In a girl’s washroom! This way!” She grabbed Harry’s arm and together they ran down the hall while Penny was facing the other way. He heard Padma say, “There’s no time to get a teacher. Hopefully the troll’s still down in the dungeons!”

As they approached their destination, they heard Hermione screaming.

Harry pushed the door open and called his wand to his right hand. He saw the troll swinging its club at Hermione, destroying half the bathroom in the process as she scooted out of the way just in time.

It took another swing at Hermione, who’d gotten herself trapped in a corner, and Harry shouted, “Accio club!” causing the club to fly out of the troll’s hand, right at Harry. As he quickly moved out of the way, he said, “Maybe that wasn’t such a brilliant idea.”

The troll turned around when it lost its club and focused his attention on Harry. He pulled back his fist to punch Harry, but before the fist made contact, Padma had thrown a metal pipe, hitting the troll in the face. It now growled at her, stepping away from Harry.

In the mean time, Hermione had her wand out and was placing herself so that the troll was directly between its club and herself. She climbed on top of one of the few remaining sinks and shouted, “Accio club!” while pointing her wand.

Harry saw the club he’d summoned minutes earlier start moving at full speed toward the troll’s head. The monster was about to move toward Padma until Harry sent a stunner that he knew would only annoy a troll at its foot. The spell startled the troll long enough so that he didn’t move out of the way. The club hit the monster in the face like a knock-out punch and the troll fell to the floor unconscious with a broken nose and teeth missing.

At that moment, Professors McGonagall, Snape, and Quirrel entered the room.

Minerva took one look around and seemed to age ten years. "Explain yourselves."

At that moment, a panic-stricken Penny Clearwater burst into the room. "Thank God you're alive! When I saw you weren't with the group, I left them with the other prefects. Why did you leave us?"

Hermione spoke up. "It was my..."

"It was my fault," said Harry firmly while Hermione stared at him in surprise. "I thought I could handle the troll and went looking for it. Hermione and Padma were trying to save me from my own stupidity. If it weren't for them, I'd probably be dead."

"You?" asked Minerva, clearly looking displeased.

"You are arrogant, aren't you, Mr. McGonagall? I'd say a detention is in order, along with..." said Snape, who had torn pants revealing blood on his leg and was limping.

"Five points taken from Ravenclaw for this serious lack of judgment. I'm disappointed in you, Harry," said Minerva, overriding whatever ridiculously unfair amount of points Snape planned on taking away. She turned to the others. "Both of you girls are very fortunate. Not many first-years could take on a fully-grown mountain troll. Five points each – will be added, for sheer dumb luck."

-

Soon the three first-years were walking toward the tower with Penelope behind them (making sure they actually went to Ravenclaw Tower) when Hermione came up to Harry and whispered. "Why did you say it was your fault?"

"Because it was," he whispered back. "I should have been honest with you. I hope you can forgive me."

"Why didn't you tell me last week after I finished Occlumency?"

"I, I didn't want to make you worry about letting the secret slip. I mean, I mess up enough as it is. I did think about it. I'm sorry that I didn't tell

you. I guess I haven't been much of a best friend to you. If it makes you feel any better, I haven't actually told anybody. Not my friends in America, no one. I don't have a clue how Fred and George found out about it, but I only admitted it at wandpoint. Honestly Hermione, the only thing I've lied about is my name. I've never lied to you about anything that wasn't directly related to that. Now I don't have to lie to you about anything."

"I guess I can understand that, but it hurt me to find out that way."

"If you'd like, I'll tell you the details tonight after everyone else is upstairs."

"I would like that, thanks."

"Maybe you can help me keep my secret better." At this point, Harry raised his voice so that Padma could also hear him. "Did you notice the injury that Snape had on his leg?"

"Yes," said Padma, "I guess you're talking to me again?"

"Yes, I'm sorry Padma. It's just..."

"I know you two had some kind of argument that you had to get sorted out. Anyway, I hope they can't fix his leg."

Hermione smiled. "Maybe that cut will get infected and they'll have to remove his leg."

"Then they'll just need to remove the rest of him as well."

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 4 – Protesting Against Snape

“...and so my official name actually is Harry Mark McGonagall, and until last spring I didn’t know any different.” He added with a smirk, “So legally, I wasn’t lying when I said my last name is McGonagall.”

Harry was explaining the details of how he’d been kidnapped and adopted to Hermione.

“That’s truly amazing,” said the girl. “It’s also a brilliant way to keep you safe. Only one person in Britain knew where you were, and she’s not the one anybody would guess.”

“And no one would’ve guessed that I was in America,” Harry added.

“And they still don’t know you’re at Hogwarts.”

“So now that you know, do you think you can forget?”

“No, but I can help you stop messing up.” She took a deep breath. “Most of the clues I had were from spending so much time with you, but some things, like the pain in the shape of a lightning bolt on your head, were easy to spot.”

“I don’t know why I have that pain, but what can I do about it?”

“For now you can pretend that it’s your whole head and not just that small area, and we can start making note of every time you get the headaches to try to determine what is causing them. There’s got to be more to it than just being at Hogwarts.”

“I know. The first time was at the opening feast just before Snape tried to read my mind. At first I thought it was part of the attack, but the headaches don’t just come when I’m around him.”

“We were in Professor Quirrel’s classroom the last time it happened. Have you gotten the headaches in any other classrooms?”

“No. I mean Snape tries using Legilimency on me in his class, but I don’t get a headache from forcing him out of my mind. It’s actually a bit amusing.”

Hermione furrowed her brow in concentration. "So it happens in Professor Quirrel's classroom and in the Great Hall, where he's eating. Has it happened any place that he wasn't at?"

"No, now that you mention it. I wonder why that is. Do you think he could be up to something?"

"I'm not sure what that means, but we should keep an eye on him."

"Maybe I'm just allergic to whatever that smelly thing is that he keeps inside his turban," said Harry, chuckling.

-

The next morning at breakfast, Harry and Hermione were sitting with Padma and Penny when a Gryffindor prefect with red hair walked up to the table. Hermione was asking Penny how she liked being a prefect when she was interrupted.

"Hello Penelope," he said pleasantly, completely ignoring the younger students near the Ravenclaw prefect.

"Hi, Percy isn't it?" He nodded. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Why yes there is. There is a Hogsmeade visit this Saturday, and I ask that you would do me the honor of allowing me to be your escort?"

She blushed slightly. "All...alright. What would..."

"Splendid. I'll see you then." He turned around and walked away without another word, leaving her speechless.

"That was rude," said Padma.

"He was, er, probably nervous," said Penny, "and then relieved that he'd gotten an answer so he left in a hurry."

"If you say so, Penny," said Hermione, "but I wouldn't go out with a boy who just walks away while I'm speaking to him."

"Isn't he one of Fred and George's brothers?" asked Harry.

“Yes, he’s Percy Weasley,” said Padma. “By his own admission, he’s the best prefect in the school. He completely disapproves of his younger brothers. He always seems a bit arrogant.”

“Then why are you going out with him?” asked Padma.

She shrugged her shoulders. “I thought I’d give him the benefit of the doubt. Besides, I didn’t have a date.”

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The next Potions class Harry had was the same as usual. No one but Harry and Hermione would look Snape in the eye, and every fifteen minutes or so, the Greasy Git would try to read one of their minds and get forced out, stumbling backwards. This caused him to take more points away as students chuckled at him. During this particular class, Harry noticed a small beetle flying in one of the corners.

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The day of Penny’s date arrived, and she joined Harry and his friends at breakfast a little later than usual.

“Good morning guys,” she said.

“Morning Penny,” said Harry. “Is that a new outfit?” She smiled and nodded. “It looks real nice.”

“Thanks Harry.”

“You really do look great,” said Padma, “You’ll knock Percy’s socks off.” Hermione nodded in agreement.

“Penelope, you’re late,” said Percy from behind them.

“What?” asked Penny, turning around to face him.

“You showed up here later than usual, so you won’t be done with breakfast at your usual time. Which means that we won’t have as much time in Hogsmeade. Do try and hurry up.”

As he took off without another word, Hermione said, "You should tell him the date is off if he wants to act like that. He didn't even say what time he wanted to leave with you."

Penny sighed. "He, he just wants to spend time with me, and he's afraid we won't have time. I did show up fifteen minutes later than usual. He's just anxious for our date to start."

"If you say so."

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Fifteen minutes later, Percy and Penny were walking together toward the carriages. She'd let him hold her hand when he grabbed it as soon as she got up after hurrying through her breakfast.

"You really should work on your punctuality, Penelope."

"Just call me Penny."

"For example, I've never been late to any class for my entire Hogwarts career. I've worked hard and as a result always gotten the best grades, and now my prefect status." He stuck out his chest in pride. "It's not going to stop here, you know. I intend to be Head Boy. After that, I'll get a job in the Ministry of Magic, and rise up through the ranks. I should be head of an important department before I'm thirty, in the perfect position to become the next Minister when Mr. Fudge decides to step down."

About half-way through this speech, Penny started tuning him out. They were now leaving the carriage as Percy continued bragging about what he was going to do.

"While wearing a prefect badge, we should be examples to the other students. I understand that during the troll incident, you left most of the Ravenclaw students behind when you were supposed to be leading them to Ravenclaw Tower."

"Three of the first years were missing, so I had to find them." She said, snapped back into the conversation by mention of the troll.

“But those three troublemakers got you to shirk your responsibilities to the other students.”

“There were five other prefects with them.”

“But there should’ve been six. You shouldn’t have bothered with the students who refused to follow you.”

“But it’s our job to make sure that they’re safe.”

“No, it’s our job to tell them what they should do to be safe. If they don’t want to listen, it’s not our fault. Take that ringleader Harry McGonagall for instance. You should’ve known he was a troublemaker the moment he wasn’t sorted into his aunt’s house. He’s been trying to stir up trouble since classes started with that stupid C.A.R.E. club, trying to make the most respected members of our society look bad. I understand he’s even had altercations with the Malfoy boy, a member of one of those respected families. He’s also caused trouble with Professor Snape. You should’ve lost points for leaving the group to find him and his friends.”

“He’s an eleven-year-old boy, and he’s right about house elves. Malfoy’s father is one of the worst elf abusers out there; they’ve got pictures of him beating an elf in the middle of Diagon Alley! Harry’s at the top of all his classes but Potions, and that’s because of the trouble Snape is causing by trying to read everybody’s mind. Harry knows more about Potions than I do. He’s never been anything but nice to me and anybody besides Snape and Malfoy, and what’s wrong with being a Ravenclaw?”

“Nothing, Penelope,” said Percy condescendingly, “It’s just that Gryffindor is where his family is, and so he must have been rebellious to end up elsewhere.”

“Maybe he’s just different. I can’t believe you want to simply show off your prefect badge without doing anything! No matter what you claim, that’s what you’re doing if you wouldn’t go after three missing first-years while there’s a troll in the castle. I thought you were supposed to be a ‘brave Gryffindor’ anyway.” She took a deep breath. “Look, I don’t think we’re going to get along very well, so let’s end this date right now as a mistake, Okay?”

“Fine. If you’ll take a first-year’s side rather than a fellow prefect then you obviously have problems with your priorities!” He took off with a red face, leaving Penny behind. She wasn’t sure if she was happy or sad that the date was over, but decided that she would never date Percy Weasley again.

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When Penny got back a few hours later, walking hand-in-hand with Oliver Wood, she had bought some snacks from Honeydukes for all the Ravenclaw first and second years. When asked how the date went, she simply replied, “We both realized it was a mistake before we got to the first store and split up. We have absolutely nothing in common. While I was at Honeydukes, I ran across Gryffindor’s Quidditch Captain, and we decided to have a butterbeer together at the Three Broomsticks.”

The next morning when the Daily Prophet arrived, most of the students received a surprise. The front page was about Hogwarts.

“Hogwarts Students’ Privacy Regularly Invaded:

Headmaster Dumbledore Does Nothing About It

By Rita Skeeter

The right to privacy is essential to all our lives, but it is robbed from our children when we send them to Hogwarts. It has come to this reporter’s attention that Potions Master and head of Slytherin House Severus Snape, a former Death Eater under Professor Dumbledore’s protection for questionable reasons, regularly practices Legilimency, a type of mind-reading which requires eye contact, on his students with the blessing of the headmaster. The reason this has come to light is that certain students have been taught Occlumency, the defense against Legilimency, and have frustrated his efforts.

However, that’s not all that Snape is guilty of. Professor McGonagall, the Deputy Headmistress, has recently given this reporter access to overwhelming evidence that Snape has abused his position over and over again for the past decade. She has presented this evidence to the headmaster countless times calling for action to be taken, but

claims, 'my pleas have fallen on deaf ears.' For full details of Snape's abuses of his position, see page 3. One has to wonder what Headmaster Dumbledore is playing at, putting a man like that into a teaching position. He most certainly does not have the children's best interests at heart..."

Another article talked about how a troll got into the castle on Halloween. Rita Skeeter basically tore Dumbledore's reputation to shreds. Harry, along with every student who received the paper, looked up to the Head Table where both Dumbledore and Snape appeared furious. Minnie appeared rather smug until Albus said something to her. She shouted her reply.

"I will not see you privately so you can sack me without witnesses! I simply gave that reporter the same evidence I've been showing you for ten years! This is supposed to be a school, not a torture chamber for children! That's what Potions class is if you're not a Slytherin! I will not apologize for telling the truth!"

Harry started clapping for his aunt and was soon joined by almost everybody who wasn't in Slytherin. She started to blush.

"Silence!" said Dumbledore authoritatively. He then took the podium with a pleasant look and a twinkle in his eyes. "As most of you are aware because of this morning's edition of the Daily Prophet, there is a dispute between a few members of the faculty. I believe that as students, you should simply ignore it and go about your studies as you normally would, showing the proper respect to ALL your teachers."

Someone from Gryffindor shouted, "But he's a Death Eater! He should be in Azkaban!"

Another said, "I always knew Snape was no good!"

More comments about both Snape and Dumbledore were said until the hall was filled with so much noise you couldn't hear yourself think. "Silence!" said the headmaster again. "I believe it is time for breakfast to end."

It being a Sunday, they didn't have any classes. Harry and Hermione decided to visit Minerva. The first thing Harry asked was, "Are you getting fired?"

She smiled, "No. Professor Dumbledore knows that if he fires me right after that article printed, he will be sacked as well. He can get away with almost anything, but not that. I had to do something when I learned that he doesn't even bother reading negative mail sent by parents. He has an elf deal with that, even the howlers. I had wondered why he wasn't bombarded with them after you two made sure everyone knows that Snape's reading their minds."

"So what's going to happen, Professor?" asked Hermione.

"Well, the Board of Governors will meet and look at the evidence. However, I don't expect to win. Lucius Malfoy owns the board, and he's one of Snape's few friends."

"Snape is Draco Malfoy's godfather," added Harry disgustedly.

"But regardless," said Minerva, "This is putting some pressure on Professor Dumbledore."

"Is that true about Snape being a Death Eater?" asked Harry.

"I actually don't know. All that the headmaster says to anyone who questions Snape is that he trusts him, as though that alone would put our minds at ease. If I were to guess, I'd say that he was a Death Eater who betrayed You-Know-Who, perhaps did some espionage for the light side, so Dumbledore decided to protect him."

"So he's probably a murderer who betrayed his friends to stay out of Azkaban," said Harry with a mean look in his eyes.

"Yes," said Aunt Minnie. "Maybe the details will be revealed at his hearing. I would say that even if it turns out that he deserves protection that still doesn't make him a good teacher. I'd think a reformed Death Eater wouldn't act like he does anyway. He's certainly not discouraging Slytherins from becoming dark wizards. He's teaching them to lie and cheat their way to the top. Wait until you see their first Quidditch match! When Gryffindor plays, I only

hope there won't be any serious injuries. I know we won't win because of the poor sportsmanship of the Slytherin team. They win by injuring all the other team's players – not by Quidditch skills. And then Snape brags that his house won like it was an accomplishment!"

-

The next week, if possible, Snape was even worse during Potions than before. He vanished both Harry's and Hermione's potions five minutes into the 'lesson' and declared they each earned a zero for the day and both had a detention with Filch.

A few days after that, Harry found out that parents had put together a petition to get rid of Snape. That Saturday would be a hearing with the Board of Governors, Dumbledore, Minerva, Snape, and Cornelius Fudge. Fudge would be there with a few aurors in case they needed to arrest Snape after the hearing for invading the privacy of minors. Any other member of Hogwarts faculty, as well as any Ministry department head, was welcome to attend. No one else, including reporters, students, and parents, was allowed at the hearing.

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Friday night, Harry was talking to his family with his mirror. "Aunt Minnie doesn't think he'll be sacked. She believes he'd have to murder a student in the Great Hall in front of a hundred witnesses before Dumbledore would stop protecting him."

"It sounds like you're not getting a good Potions education," said Cindy with a frown.

"I already know all the first-year potions, so I'm not missing much. Aunt Minnie says that he doesn't conduct the O.W.L.s or N.E.W.T.s, so as long as I study the subject, it actually doesn't matter what grades that slimy ba..."

"Harry!" said a stern-looking Cindy while Brianna giggled. Mark looked like he wanted to laugh.

"I was gonna say 'slimy bad teacher.' Honest."

"Of course, dear."

"Sure, Harry," said Brianna. "I'll bet Hermione doesn't like it when you use that language."

"Does Bobby like it when you do?" asked Harry, reminding his sister of their truce.

He looked at his parents again. "The point is that Snape doesn't matter. He takes house points all the time so that Slytherin wins the meaningless house cup no matter what. The only things that bug me are detentions. And they're really stupid! This is a magical school, but if you have to clean or something, they make you do it the muggle way! What do you learn from that? The truth is that the magical way gets things cleaner, and it's faster. I'll bet the entire school could be cleaned magically in one day, but Filch the caretaker does everything by hand so he gets through the castle in a week unless he's got a dozen kids doing it for him! Then while we're cleaning he talks about the old punishments where they'd hang kids by their toes. The man is psychotic!"

"Then why don't you prank him?"

"Brianna!" said Cindy, "Your brother gets into enough mischief without you giving him ideas." Harry smiled but said nothing.

"Try to stay out of trouble, Harry," said Mark.

"I always try, dad," answered Harry, "but I get in trouble with Snape for breathing. I honestly think I'd be in less trouble for just skipping class. I'd learn just as much if not more."

"Now Harry, don't make me come over there..."

"That might be a good idea, mom! You can tell Snape and Dumbledore off!"

-

The next morning at breakfast, Harry and Hermione were approached by Fred and George Weasley.

“You may have noticed...”

“That our revered Potions master is gone...”

“And will be gone for most of the day.”

“We were wondering...”

“If you’d like to help us...”

“Show him our appreciation and respect...”

“By leaving him a surprise in his living quarters...”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other for a moment before Harry said, “Absolutely!”

Hermione said, “If anyone deserves it, it’s that creep!”

Padma then surprised them by saying, “Count me in!”

Harry quickly smiled at her. “Great. Where can we meet to discuss the finer details?”

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After they met in a hidden passageway, they snuck into Snape’s living quarters (by pointing a wand under the door and summoning the hinges – he never figured that out) and set up a prank for the first person to walk in.

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At dinner, they saw that Dumbledore (who looked tired), Minerva (who appeared livid), and Snape (who had a smug look on his face) were back at the head table.

“What do you think happened?” said Padma.

“Obviously Snape wasn’t sacked,” said Hermione.

“He hasn’t been back to his office yet, either,” said Harry. “After dinner, let’s ask Aun, Professor McGonagall.”

They continued eating until they were full, and waited until Minerva had left the Great Hall to follow her. They arrived at her door while she was still walking through it.

“Professor McGonagall,” Harry called out.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Could you tell us what happened?”

She sighed, “Oh, I suppose. Come on in.”

After she got them all some tea, she began speaking.

“The meeting began with Lucius Malfoy stating that he believed the allegations against Snape were false. I honestly don’t know why Professor Dumbledore didn’t stop backing Snape when he realized that he was on the same side as Malfoy. I knew from the beginning that I was fighting a losing battle no matter how much evidence I had against Snape. I at least was able to demand to know why Dumbledore trusts him, and that’s the worst part of it.”

“Why does he trust him?” asked Harry.

She gave Harry a pointed look. “I trust you’ve all heard of Harry Potter.”

Harry and Hermione controlled their expressions to remain neutral while Padma said, “The Boy-Who-Lived-and-Vanished?”

“You mustn’t tell anyone what I’m about to reveal.” All three of them nodded. “Yes. You see, Snape gave You-Know-Who the information that caused him to target the Potters. You see, James Potter and he had been bitter enemies at school. Anyway, just before they were killed, Snape came to Professor Dumbledore with a cock-and-bull story about being sorry that the Potters were being targeted, and he believed him. Snape was a Death Eater, and had personally killed and tortured countless people, but Professor Dumbledore protects

him because he claimed to be sorry about one target and became a spy for a short time. It's interesting that when I asked, Professor Dumbledore had to admit that none of Snape's information led to the capture of a single Death Eater, nor did it save any lives."

Without Padma noticing, Hermione took Harry's hand while his aunt was revealing this information. Padma said, "I wonder if Snape took Harry Potter and killed him."

"I hope not," said Hermione, playing along.

"He probably wanted to," said McGonagall seriously. "I can just imagine how he'd treat the son of his worst rival. Oh, and here's the best part of the story. Snape said he owed James Potter a life debt. Even if that were true, paying that debt wouldn't mean he shouldn't go to Azkaban. It would mean that Snape has no remorse at all about what he's done, and that he only felt obligated to help James."

Harry was staying quiet, but he was very mad. Minnie could see it in his eyes. "Anyway, Snape has been ordered not to read any more students' minds. I don't know how they expect him to obey that. He has also been put on probation for the rest of the school year. Until that is finished, he cannot give or take house points, nor can he hand out punishments to anyone who is not in Slytherin. If he feels that a student in another house needs to be punished, he must inform that student's head of house, who will investigate the matter. I have told both Professors Sprout and Flitwick that they are more than welcome to use my pensieve to determine appropriate action in such an instance. I for one won't simply take Snape's word for anything."

"Well, that's good, isn't it?" asked Hermione nervously.

"It's better than nothing," said Minnie, "but they wouldn't hear a word about his incompetence as a teacher. Therefore, the important subject of Potions still isn't taught at Hogwarts." She sighed. "At least we got some results. I think the only reason for that is so it looks like the Board of Governors is doing something. Lucius Malfoy wants to at least appear like he cares about students in a case like this one where the press is involved. I'm sure tomorrow's headlines will make him out to be a hero for slapping Snape on the wrist."

"I guess," said Harry coldly.

"Miss Granger, Miss Patil, I believe you should probably be getting back to your common room. I'd like to speak to my nephew for a few minutes if you don't mind."

"Of course not, Professor McGonagall," said Hermione, figuring that she wanted to talk to Harry about Snape's involvement in his birth-parents' deaths.

Once the girls had left, Minerva charmed her door for privacy. "I thought about not telling you about it, but I know that I'd want to know in your position."

"Thanks for that, Aunt Minnie. I can't believe that Dumbledore lets that murderer walk free!"

"There's more to the story, I'm afraid. I haven't been told all of it, but there was a prophecy made regarding you and You-Know-Who. Snape heard part of it and told his master. Professor Dumbledore isn't sure about the prophecy anymore because of how you disappeared, but he still hopes that you'll fulfill it. All he said is that according to the prophecy, you were the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord. I'm hoping that it already was fulfilled when James and Lily were killed. There is a copy of it in the Department of Mysteries, but only you can touch it where it's kept. To see it, you'd have to reveal your identity to someone at the Ministry, and I'd strongly advise against that for obvious reasons."

He sighed. "That's alright. It looks like I haven't been following it too closely anyway. Besides, you always said that Divination is a wooly discipline. Anyway, if the prophecy is true, it'll happen whether I know about it or not."

She took a deep breath. "I suppose so. Sometimes I wonder why I even stay at Hogwarts."

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At the same time, Severus Snape was strutting into his quarters. He performed the special unlocking spell that he'd invented on his door

and opened it with something similar to a smile on his face. As he took his first step inside the room, an orange cloud appeared above his head and began to rain pumpkin juice on him.

As he was getting drenched by the sticky liquid, he pulled out his wand. As soon as he cast a spell, a neon-green powder filled the room, sticking to his body as he choked on it for a few moments. He ran to the toilet to clean up, but found that he couldn't open the door, and every time he tried another spell, the room filled up with the powder again, except it was sky blue. He tried his bedroom to find it was also locked. With apparently no alternative, he quickly walked out of his quarters toward the nearest men's room, only to be photographed by a flashing camera that was floating in front of the door. As soon as the picture was taken, the camera disappeared and a venomous Snape managed to finally clean up after walking past a small group of students gaping and laughing at him.

-

The next day, copies of that photo could be found all over the school. The other heads of houses each got one to hang in their offices, although Dumbledore did not approve.

Snape's behavior in classes actually did change. He simply put instructions on the board and ignored everyone. Even Neville commented during a study group how much easier it was to make potions without Snape's interference. All the Gryffindors had to worry about was making sure the Slytherins didn't interfere (since they're the ones who shared a class with them – Ravenclaws were with Hufflepuffs) and that was solved by dividing the room evenly into two sides, making sure the two houses stayed separate. Snape didn't say anything about the new seating arrangement because he knew that he was on probation and the students knew he couldn't threaten them.

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One thing that did temporarily raise Snape's spirits was the Quidditch match on November 9th, wherein Gryffindor's Keeper and captain, Oliver Wood, was put out of commission by a Slytherin beater very early in the game. His broom was broken by the destructive ball, and it couldn't stay in the air for long after that. Fortunately he wasn't hurt

too badly when he hit the ground, but was unable to play for the rest of the game even if he'd found a replacement broom. Without a decent Seeker to bail them out, Gryffindor lost terribly, but not before Fred and George Weasley knocked both Slytherin beaters off their brooms with well-timed Bludger hits. Unfortunately for Snape, at the end of the game the Weasley twins also 'accidentally' sent a Bludger that hit Snape in the face, breaking his nose and effectively removing his gloating smile. They both got detentions from McGonagall, but felt it was worth it.

A few weeks later, Harry mentioned how he missed the American holiday known as Thanksgiving, where students got Thursday and Friday off school and had a turkey feast. Brianna naturally gloated to Harry about that on Thanksgiving Day.

Soon November turned into December and with that came the end-of-term exams. Harry and Hermione both knew they'd aced their tests, although it remained to be seen what grade Snape would give them. They decided to worry about that when they got the results. They also knew their study group would do well. C.A.R.E. was doing well with membership in the school, but Hermione was still hoping to make more of a political difference. She planned on finding out if any members had any political connections that could be helpful. For now, they were leaving the castle for their Christmas break.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 5 – Christmas Break

Harry woke up early on the day they were leaving Hogwarts for Christmas break. He'd owl-ordered assorted candies from Honeydukes for most of his friends, to be delivered at Christmas. However, he had something different for his best friend, and he thought he'd prefer to give it to her now.

After he had dressed, he went down to the Common Room holding a small wrapped package and found Hermione relaxing on a couch with her head buried in a book. Without her noticing, he plopped down on the couch beside her, causing her to drop her book in surprise.

"Good morning!" said Harry as he chuckled at her.

She lightly slapped Harry on the arm. "Harry! You scared me!"

"Sorry," he chuckled.

"You are not," she said as she picked up her book.

"Maybe not, but I do have a gift for you."

She smiled at her best friend. "Really? Shouldn't we wait until Christmas?"

"I want you to have it now." Harry handed her the small wrapped package.

"Alright," she said as she carefully unwrapped the gift. When she removed the wrapping paper, she found two mirrors like Harry's.

"I thought you'd like a way to talk to your parents while you're at Hogwarts. One answers to your name; the other to your mom's. You can also call mine, Brianna's, my parents' or Aunt Minnie's with it. They work like phones in that you can call anyone who has one. Mine answers to 'Harry McGonagall,' in case you were wondering."

She wrapped her arms around him in a tight hug. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

“You’re welcome, Hermione!”

“This really does mean a lot to me.” She then pointed her wand toward the girls’ staircase and said, “Accio Harry’s gift!” About a minute later, a neatly wrapped package came floating toward them. She lowered her eyes as she said, “It’s not nearly as wonderful as what you gave me, but I hope you like it.”

He grinned as he took the present from her. “I’m sure I’ll love it.” After tearing the wrapping paper off of it, he found that she’d given him a set of the ‘Lord of the Rings’ books which also included ‘The Hobbit.’ The illustrations on the covers were moving.

“Imagine my surprise when I found out Tolkien was a wizard, and his books were about events that actually happened a long time ago. When I found that out, naturally I tried to find out what kind of spell could have been placed on the ring to keep Sauron from dying, as though his soul were somehow connected to it, but I couldn’t find anything in Hogwarts’ library about that. It must be a very dark spell. Anyway, I guess I’m rambling on and on. You don’t already have them do you?”

Harry smiled at his friend. “No, I don’t. I have heard of them, but never actually read the books. Thanks a lot.”

“You’re welcome. I hope you enjoy them.”

“I’m sure I will. I hope you’re still planning on picking up our books for next year during the break.”

“Of course, Harry. I got the list of second-year books from Cho last night. You’re so lucky that you can practice magic during the holidays.”

Harry chuckled. “I just don’t understand why the Ministry of Magic is against kids doing magic. I mean the parents of Muggleborn students have to wait seven years before they can see what their kids learned in school! They may even wonder if their kids are actually learning anything. It’s like the Ministry is hoping that your parents will decide to withdraw you from Hogwarts because they don’t think you’re learning anything useful.”

"I know. It's hard to explain what I'm learning in a letter. Maybe I can convince my parents to make our next vacation in America so we can see you. Then we could put on a bit of a magic show for them to demonstrate what we've learned."

"That would be great!" Harry then looked at his watch. "I guess it's about time we went down to breakfast." He then stood and helped her up, and together they walked down to the Great Hall for the last time that year.

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After an excellent breakfast, all the students who weren't staying for the holidays rode the carriages into Hogsmeade with their luggage. Harry and Professor McGonagall joined Hermione and Padma on one of them.

"Professor McGonagall," said Padma, "I'm surprised you're joining us."

"I admit this is my first time accompanying students on the carriages," she said with a slight smile, "but I thought it would be best to get an early start. As you should know, one cannot apparate inside Hogwarts grounds."

"Yes, it's written in 'Hogwarts, A History,'" agreed Hermione.

"Yes. When we get into Hogsmeade, I'll be apparating Harry and myself to the airport so we can spend the holidays with our family."

Padma looked surprised. "You ride muggle airplanes?"

"No, but most international airports have a hidden section like Platform Nine and Three-Quarters that leads to an international floo network." She went on to explain it for the rest of the carriage ride.

When they got off the carriages, Harry wished Padma and Hermione a "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year."

Hermione hugged Harry quickly before stepping onto the train. "I'll call you tonight, Harry. Have a good trip."

“You, too.”

“Happy Christmas, Professor McGonagall.”

“Happy Christmas to you, too, Miss Granger.”

After Hermione boarded the Hogwarts Express, Aunt Minnie took Harry’s hand and they disappeared with a small ‘pop.’

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An hour later, Harry was walking toward the exit of O’Hare airport in Chicago with his aunt, and they were looking for their family. Harry was pushing a trolley that had two trunks and an obviously upset Hedwig in her cage. She’d never traveled by floo before and obviously didn’t enjoy it. It was hard to hear anything above her squawking.

“Harry, Aunt Minnie! Over here!” came the loud voice of an excited nine-year-old girl with brown hair and blue eyes who ran up to them, hugging them both fiercely.

“Hi Brianna!” said Harry as he happily returned his sister’s hug. “It’s good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you, Harry! You too, Aunt Minnie!” She then yawned, covering her mouth with her hand. Even though it was about noon Hogwarts time it was very early Chicago time.

“Hello, Brianna! How are you?” Minerva stepped back and looked her niece over. “You’ve gotten taller.”

She smiled. “So has Harry. I’ll bet Hermione likes...”

“How’s Bobby doing?” interrupted Harry, silencing his sister while making her blush.

“Harry, Aunt Minnie!” said a tired-looking Mark, who’d just walked up to them with his wife. “It’s wonderful to see you both, but why don’t we get to the car so we can speak more freely. Besides, parking here is expensive.”

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After some hugs were exchanged, they left the airport and braved Chicago traffic. The first thing Harry noticed when they got into the house was, "You put up the Christmas tree without me!"

Cindy said, "We didn't want to put up the Christmas tree just a few days before Christmas. That would be too much work to have it up for such a short time. We wanted it to stay up for a few weeks. However, you can help put the gifts under it."

"At present no presents are present, under the Christmas tree," said Mark with a smirk.

Harry shook his head. "That is not very funny, dad."

"That doesn't change the fact that you need to put the presents under there. All but yours and Brianna's are in the closet. They're somewhere else. Your mom and I know about how you can use magic to find out what you're getting."

"What?" said Harry in mock offence, "How could you insult our integrity like that?"

"We're truly hurt," said Brianna, adding fake tears to the show.

"I'm sure," said Cindy with a smile. She then hugged Harry (not for the first time that day) saying, "I missed you so much!" before kissing him on the cheek.

"Come on mom," Harry said while pulling away from the affection that embarrassed him, "I talked to you at least once a week while I was gone."

"It's just not the same."

"So Aunt Minnie," said Mark, changing the subject as Harry summoned the presents from the closet, "How are things going in school administration since Snape kept his job?"

She sighed. "To be honest, staff meetings are like a cold war. Almost everyone is against Professor Dumbledore and Snape. I'm glad that Snape's not harassing the kids this year, but what about next year and the year after that? I don't know what to do now. I'm seriously considering leaving Hogwarts next year. Maybe getting a job at an American school. I'm sure Harry's credits could be transferred if he wants to leave as well. I'm tired of being a part of a school where Snape's behavior is tolerated."

"You can't just leave, Aunt Minnie," said Harry. "All the magical kids in Europe have to put up with him. If you leave then nobody will stand up for them!"

"What if you hired a lawyer?" suggested Cindy.

"There's a wizarding law office in Little Salem," said Mark, "Maybe you could talk to them. Even if they can't take a European case, they may be able to recommend someone."

Minnie looked thoughtful. "I, I don't know..."

"Come on, Minnie," said Cindy, "We were planning on going there the day after Christmas anyway."

"Well, I guess it couldn't hurt."

"Then it's settled," said Mark with a yawn. "For now, I think I'm gonna go back to bed for a nap. I'm tired. At lunchtime, I think we should go out to celebrate Harry's return. If any of you are hungry, then just eat a light snack."

"Okay, I'll let Hedwig loose to fly around and get to know the neighborhood. She's never been here before. Once she's out, I'll unpack."

Brianna then said, "Hey Aunt Minnie, could you test my Occlumency if I help you unpack?"

The aged woman smiled. "Of course, dear. Come up to the guest room with me." She then levitated her trunk up the stairs, and the two of them followed.

Harry said, "I'm gonna start reading my gift from Hermione." He then showed his mom the books, explaining what his friend had told him about them being historic. Cindy was astonished at this news.

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After having lunch at Pizza Hut, the McGonagalls returned home and Brianna magically stuck their newest Christmas cards on the wall, bragging that it was her job. Aunt Minnie complimented her niece's sticking charm, as well as her mastery of Occlumency. Harry then started playing Mega Man on his Nintendo commenting, "I didn't realize how much I missed this until I didn't have it."

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As dinnertime approached, Harry was beginning to feel very tired and said he wanted to go to bed.

"You're experiencing jet-lag," said Cindy with a slight smile. The only way to beat it is to stay up until bedtime. If you do that, tomorrow you should be almost back to normal."

Harry was about to reply when he felt the mirror in his pocket vibrate. He pulled it out to find out that Hermione was calling him. "Hi Hermione! How are you doing? How was the train ride?" As he spoke to her, he made his way to his bedroom and closed the door.

"It was alright. I sat with our study group. My parents were thrilled with the mirrors you gave us! They wanted to say something." Her face moved out of the mirror, soon to be replaced by Mrs. Granger's.

"Thank you very much, Harry. This was a very thoughtful gift. We're glad our daughter has a wonderful friend like you!"

Harry blushed slightly at the compliment. "Um, you're welcome. She's a great friend, too."

"We hope you enjoy the holidays with your family. Be sure to tell them we said 'Happy Christmas.'"

"I will. You have a Merry Christmas, too."

When Hermione's face was back inside the mirror, she said, "We went to Diagon Alley after the train ride, so I picked up our sets of second-year books. Hopefully they'll be the same ones we use next year, but even if they're not, they should cover the same material anyway, so we'll know the information."

Harry smiled. "Thanks!"

"No problem. I also found out that Susan Bones is related to the head of Magical Law Enforcement, Madam Amelia Bones. She's her niece. She has a lot of pull with the Ministry. I've written Susan to talk to her aunt about C.A.R.E. I'm still finding out about the others, but if we can get enough influential people involved, we could really make a difference."

"That's great! You're really doing a great job, Hermione! I just know we'll be able to make a difference!"

She blushed at the compliment. "Thanks."

"It's the truth. Aunt Minnie is going to talk to a lawyer about Snape."

"A solicitor? Do you think that could help? I hope they'll be able to force Snape out of Hogwarts and get a proper Potions teacher. He makes everybody who's not in Slytherin abhor that class, when there's so much to be gained by properly understanding that subject. A Potions N.E.W.T. is required for countless occupations, but the vast majority of students happily drop the class once they've taken their O.W.L.s. Penny said she plans on dropping it next year, just to get away from Snape. She had hoped to be a healer, which requires a Potions N.E.W.T., but she just can't stand that greasy git, and frankly I don't blame her."

Harry chuckled slightly at Hermione's outburst. "Who knows, maybe he'll be gone next year."

She sighed. "We can always hope."

"By the way, I started reading 'The Hobbit.' It seems quite interesting. That character Gandalf must look a lot like Dumb-old-dork."

Her image smiled up at him through the mirror. "I hadn't thought of it, but you're right. Don't worry though, Gandalf is much more helpful. I'm glad you're reading the book. You know how much both my parents and I appreciate your gift."

"That was no problem at all! I'm just glad you called me. I need something to keep me awake until dinner." He smirked at his friend.

She frowned. "You must be experiencing what they call jet-lag. Tell me, what is it like?"

"It feels like I didn't get enough sleep last night. My mom says the best thing to do is try to stay awake until a normal hour so that I'm pretty much adjusted tomorrow morning. She should know since she's gone through this a few times."

"Let me know if that works, will you? I asked my parents, and they said they'd consider taking a vacation to see you next summer. Hopefully I'll be able to convince them by that time."

Harry grinned widely. "I hope so!"

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They continued talking until dinner, and then after the meal, Harry and Brianna played Super Mario Bros. together until bedtime. The later it got, the more Harry's skill diminished as he fought off sleep, thus his sister, as Luigi, did much better than Harry did as Mario. Finally at nine o'clock, Harry left the living room and went to bed, falling asleep before his head even hit the pillow.

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The next day, Harry was woken up by his sister pounding on his door. "It's time for breakfast! Get up, lazy! We've got places to go!"

"I'm up, I'm up!" he shouted without even opening his eyes as he lay in bed.

"No you're not," she said, opening the door and pointing her wand at him. "*Aguamenti!*" she said, causing her wand to shoot water in his face.

"Aahh," he shouted, moving his hands to protect his face, "I'm gonna get you!" He grabbed his wand off his nightstand (he always kept one by his bed ready to grab if he needed it) as she bolted out of the room. He then grabbed his glasses with the other hand and ran out after her, wearing nothing a pair of jogging pants.

"Mom! Harry's trying to hex me for waking him up!" he heard her shout as she ran down the stairs.

"How'd you wake him up?" asked Cindy.

"By shooting water at my face! I think she even got some up my nose!" he shouted before she could answer.

"Brianna!" shouted his dad.

"Ye-aaahhh. Harry!"

At that moment her whole back was soaked from Harry doing the same spell she had. As she spun around and her parents saw the back of her hair and pajamas they both laughed at her.

"Don't shoot water at your brother without expecting him to do the same to you," said their mother with a pretty smile on her face.

Harry said, "You always told us to follow the 'golden rule,' so I assumed that she was doing unto me what she wanted me to do to her."

"Well, I think you two have settled that, so we don't have to punish either of you," said Mark, earning a surprised look from Minerva, who remained silent, "but we need to hurry up. We've got a ten o'clock appointment for Harry, followed by Brianna."

"Where?" Harry asked.

"The eye doctor," answered Cindy.

"My glasses are fine," he said.

"I remember you telling me once that you could see fine without glasses," said his dad with a slight smile. "You already know that your vision gets worse very gradually and you don't even notice it. That's why Brianna has an appointment as well." She gave a disgusted face behind her parents' backs. "She's always had perfect vision, but we like to make sure every year before it causes a problem."

"I can see just fine," she said, "well enough to aim my wand directly at Harry's face."

Mark chuckled. "That may be, but I'd like Dr. Hyle to determine that."

"Fine," she said unhappily.

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After a visit to the eye-doctor, wherein Harry did need new glasses, but Brianna still had 20/20 vision (which slightly annoyed her brother), they went out to a mall and got new winter coats, hats, gloves, and boots for the kids. Both children had outgrown last year's winter gear. They arrived back home at 11:30, and Harry went to his room to work on the homework that had been assigned over break.

After he'd been working for a few minutes, he could've sworn he'd heard someone near his door, but then it was quiet again.

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Minerva pocketed her wand with a slight smile, having just cast a silencing charm on Harry's door. She then walked back downstairs to continue the preparations.

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At exactly 12:30, Harry was startled to hear Aunt Minnie say, "Come down, Harry, it's time for lunch." He hadn't heard her walk up the stairs. He shrugged his shoulders, figuring that he'd been too absorbed in his Charms essay to notice.

"I'll be right down." He put his work down and opened his door.

He walked down the stairs and opened the door to the kitchen.

"SURPRISE!!!" he jumped back in shock, and then looked around at his family and the guests as a broad smile formed on his face. A dozen of his best friends from both muggle and magical school were standing in his kitchen. There was a sign hanging from the wall that said, 'Welcome Back Harry!'

"Hey Harry!" said Matt Burke as he walked up with Emilio Tucker and Chris Ritter.

"It's not the same at school without you there to help us stick the teacher to his chair!" said Emilio.

"Yeah, you never told us what kind of glue you used, and we haven't been able to figure it out," added Chris. All of Harry's magical friends hid their chuckles as they recognized the description of a sticking charm. Harry could even detect a hint of a smile on the edge of Aunt Minnie's frown.

The party lasted a few hours, wherein Christmas gifts were given to him, and he found out that his parents had gotten gifts for his guests as well. After most of the visitors had left, three of his magical friends, Paul Grabowski, Melissa Hearne, and Luke Wisniewski, stayed for a while longer to talk more about Hogwarts. Paul was taller than Harry with dark hair and brown eyes. Melissa was a pretty blonde girl with green eyes. Luke had pale blonde hair like Draco's, but didn't act like him at all. He had blue eyes. They had successfully pranked several professors in their magical school.

In his bedroom away from adults, Harry entertained them with tales of the pranks he and Hermione had pulled at Hogwarts, as well as discussing future pranks.

"Maybe you can charm one of the halls to have a huge dirty spot in the middle of the floor that can't be cleaned without magic," said Luke. "That Filch sounds to me like he's a squib..."

"My dad's a squib," said Harry defensively.

"Yeah, but Filch seems to hate anyone who can do magic from what you said."

"I also wonder about his relationship to that cat," added Paul.

Melissa giggled but said, "That's disgusting," in mock protest.

"Actually, he calls the cat Mrs. Norris, not Mrs. Filch."

"Makes me wonder what happened to Mr. Norris," said Luke.

"Anyway," said Melissa, changing the subject, "What's this Brianna says about Hermione being your girlfriend?"

The two boys stared at him while his cheeks turned slightly pink. "She is NOT my girlfriend!"

"You spend a lot of time together, if I remember right. Sneaking around the castle at night..."

"She's my best friend there, not my girlfriend." He actually considered Hermione his closest friend anywhere but didn't want to offend any of his other friends.

Melissa grinned at him, deciding to take a different approach. "Is she ugly, then?"

"No, she's not ugly!"

"But certainly not cute. Am I right?" she said smiling brightly. The other boys were busily holding their laughter in.

"Well, I think she's kind of cute, but that doesn't mean..."

"Of course not," she said with a wink, causing his whole face to turn red. The boys couldn't stop their laughter at that point.

"I'm gonna hex Brianna," Harry muttered under his breath.

-

At about 5:00, his friends left Harry's room to go to their homes after speaking briefly with Harry's parents.

-

It was only a few days later that Harry found himself waking up on Christmas morning. Putting a T-shirt on before leaving his room (he's slept in pajama bottoms), he hurried down the stairs to find that his and Brianna's presents had finally been placed under the Christmas tree. He also noticed that she was there as well, sitting on the floor looking at the packages, knowing that she'd be in big trouble if she touched them or used her wand on them before their parents were with them.

"Mom, Dad, Aunt Minnie," Harry called backwards from the hallway hoping to wake them up, "Merry Christmas!" He hoped they'd take the hint and hurry up to let him at his presents.

After an eternity that consisted of about five minutes, the adults were downstairs and the chaos that is opening presents began. Harry got several gifts, both magical and muggle, but what stuck out the most to him was a small rectangular gift that he'd saved for last.

As he mercilessly ripped the paper off of it, he saw that it was a black case that had a yellow lightning bolt in the center of the top. Beneath the lightning were written the words, "Touch lightning and say 'Lightning Bolt.'"

Shrugging his shoulders, he did as he was instructed, and felt the case begin to enlarge. He dropped it on the floor in surprise and watched it stretch out as the outside became transparent.

When the process was over, he saw that it was a clear case containing a broomstick, but not just any broomstick. It was the Lightning Bolt, an American broom that was slightly better than the Nimbus 2000 that was so popular in Europe. It still had a small lightning bolt in the middle with instructions to say the phrase 'Storm cloud' while touching the bolt to shrink it down.

He stared at it, literally speechless until his dad said, "Tomorrow we're going, along with your wizarding friends from the party, to Frank's Flying Funhouse in Little Salem to test out your new broom."

Although Minerva was staring at the broom in appreciation, she did say, "That's a wonderful broom, but I hope you do realize..."

Cindy smiled. "We realize he can't take it to Hogwarts until next year."

"But at least he can get some practice on it beforehand," continued Mark. "I think that if he really wants to make the team, he should put in all the practice he can. "What do you think, Harry?"

"Wow. Thanks!" He then got up and hugged both his parents tightly.

"We also got you a broomstick servicing kit that we expect you to use," said Cindy.

"Sure," Harry said as he held the broom, which he'd removed from its case, and inspected it carefully. The handle was all black except for several small gold lightning bolts along it pointing forward. Half of the bristles were black, and half were gold.

"Can I see it?" said Brianna excitedly.

"In a few minutes," he said as he seemed to be memorizing every square millimeter of his new treasured possession.

As Minerva began opening her gift, Brianna looked at her parents. "Why can't I get a broom?"

"Because Harry's been taught how to ride one..." said Mark.

"I can learn," Brianna said.

"The first thing you need to learn, young lady," said Cindy sternly, "is to not interrupt your father."

"I'm sorry. I just really, really want a broom."

Mark looked at those eyes he still had a hard time resisting. He looked at his wife, who nodded slightly. "We'll see how it goes

tomorrow. If, and I do mean if, you prove to both your mother and me that you are responsible enough to own a broom, then we'll consider getting you one for your birthday."

"Thank you!"

"But if we do," continued Cindy, "we'll only let you have it when we're going someplace safe to use it."

At that moment, Aunt Minnie recognized her present as the romance novel she'd looked at in Diagon Alley that past summer. She looked from the present to Cindy, to see her smile and wink at her.

After the rest of the presents were passed out, Harry called Hermione's mirror and the McGonagall family sang 'We Wish You A Merry Christmas' to the Granger family. After the song, Harry walked up to his room while telling his friend everything that had happened. Hermione was excited about Harry's new broom, but for some reason she seemed a bit sad for a moment when Harry talked about his American friends.

"I guess you really missed them, huh?" she asked, trying her best to look happy.

"Don't get me wrong, Hermione. I was glad to see them, and I'm happy we'll be playing on brooms tomorrow, but I didn't really think about them much while I was at Hogwarts. I'm sure they didn't think about me that much either."

She seemed a bit happier. "Really? Aren't you really close to them?"

"I'm friends with them, but I realized that you're my best friend. Is something the matter?"

Harry was now worried he'd said something wrong, because it looked like she was going to cry.

"No, no nothing's wrong," she said, suddenly grinning broadly, "You're my best friend, too." She sighed. "I guess I just really liked hearing that. It's an even better present than the mirrors."

“Speaking of presents,” said Harry, “I finished ‘The Hobbit’ and started ‘The Fellowship of the Ring.’”

She beamed at him. “I’m really happy you’re enjoying the books.”

“I’m really happy you’re my best friend. Merry Christmas.”

“Happy Christmas, Harry. I miss you.”

At that moment they both heard Cindy yell, “Harry, get down here. Breakfast is ready.”

“Me too. I think I’d better go. I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”

“Bye.”

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The McGonagalls spent the day mainly watching Christmas movies, which Harry didn’t mind once a year, but really he was itching to ride his Lightning Bolt.

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Not soon enough for Harry or Brianna, they found themselves inside Frank’s Flying Funhouse. Mark was signing everybody in and renting the necessary brooms. Only a few of Harry’s wizarding friends had their own brooms. Each of the kids had to pay for their own broom rental, as their parents had been told previously.

Harry excitedly stepped into the practice area, whose floor was charmed with a very powerful cushioning charm. Brianna and the other kids who needed to be taught how to fly went to an area with a teacher while those like Harry who already knew how to fly simply practiced on their brooms. The plan was to put together a Quidditch game in the pitch in about an hour, once the others had learned the basics of flying.

Harry excitedly pulled his shrunk broom case out of his pocket and restored its size long enough to remove his Lightning Bolt, and then shrank it, handing the case to his mom. Aunt Minnie had separated

from them once she saw where they were at, promising to return before they left. She was going to talk to a lawyer.

Harry carefully mounted his broom and took off, momentarily surprised at the new broom's acceleration, but he enjoyed every second of it. Before long he was doing loops and dives (pulling up before his mom would become too frightened) and was actually drawing a small audience. He didn't notice that until he heard clapping after a particularly amazing stunt.

He looked around to see why everyone was clapping, and blushed when he realized they were watching him. Even his friends were amazed at his talent. From behind him he heard Melissa shout, "Think fast, hotshot!"

He turned to see a red Quaffle flying at him and immediately took one hand off the broom and caught the Quaffle. He noticed a single hoop behind her and put the Quaffle under his left arm and grabbed his broom, flying defensively past her, despite her failed attempt at stealing the Quaffle, and made a goal less than ten seconds after catching the ball. He heard more applause and grinned to himself thinking, 'I guess I'm not that bad at this.'

Soon his friends, as well as others, were throwing the Quaffle around, trying to steal it, pass it, and score goals. Before long, he sensed something coming at him from the side and dodged, only to see that someone had let loose a Bludger. It didn't take long for him to identify Luke as the one holding the bat, grinning happily. He heard someone call his name and turned just in time to catch the Quaffle. He was flying toward the goal when he noticed the third type of Quidditch ball near the floor. Instinct took over then. He flew up toward the ceiling, and then went into a spectacular dive that first took him behind the Keeper where he tossed the Quaffle through the hoop. Without stopping, he continued his dive toward the floor, catching the tiny golden Snitch in his hand three feet above the ground. He then pulled up holding the winged ball proudly in his hand. The entire move took about twenty seconds, and won him more applause than anything else he'd done so far. He was thrilled until he saw the look of terror on his mom's face.

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While Harry was apologizing to his mom and promising never to dive like that again (with his fingers crossed behind his back), Minerva was just finishing her explanation of what was happening at Hogwarts to the lawyer, Sam Gordon.

The lawyer looked thoughtful for a few minutes. "Normally, I don't work on overseas cases, but this one seems rather interesting. Is Harry a citizen of England or America?"

"Actually, he has dual citizenship."

"So we could use the angle that an American citizen has been assaulted by a Hogwarts teacher, and the perpetrator has merely been slapped in the wrist, to make it an international matter. I'd naturally want to talk to Harry about that to get his side of it."

She nodded. "Of course. He'll be in America for a week and a half more."

"I also believe we can take this case much further than that. If this Mr. Snape is as bad as you say he is, we could put together a class action suit against both him and Mr. Dumbledore. Mr. Snape for mentally raping and verbally abusing students instead of teaching them for the past eleven years, and Mr. Dumbledore for knowingly allowing it to happen at his school. I found it very interesting that he actually admitted that Mr. Snape is not there because of his teaching credentials at all. I wonder if he had anything to do with Harry Potter's disappearance all those years ago."

She put on her best horrified face while reinforcing her Occlumency shields and said, "I hope not."

"After I speak with Harry, I'll take a trip to Hogwarts. That is, after contacting the American government so I don't get into trouble. After that I'll view your evidence. I'll then interview as many Hogwarts graduates that sat under Mr. Snape as I can."

"I'll be able to get you a copy of the rosters. As I said before, Snape treats the Slytherins much better than anybody else, so they probably won't have any complaints."

He smiled at his new client. "That would probably work to my advantage. Then, during Easter break, I'll interview as many students as I can. I hope to go to trial early in August, but I don't want Mr. Snape aware of it until after school is out, so that he doesn't take it out on his students. I'll also find out just how many parents and students have informed Mr. Dumbledore of Mr. Snape's conduct."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Gordon." She then shook his hand and left.

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When Minerva arrived back at Frank's Flying Funhouse, she found that there was a full Quidditch match in progress in the pitch. One team was Harry's friends, and the other consisted of strangers. She was delighted to see that her niece was a Chaser, and doing very well for someone who'd never flown before today. Melissa was another Chaser, and she didn't know the name of the boy who was the other one. She saw that the boy she believed was named Luke was one of the Beaters, but she didn't know the name of the other one. Paul was the Keeper. She briefly wondered where Harry was until she noticed him flying above everything, looking around and concentrating very hard. She then realized that he must be the Seeker.

She looked at the scoreboard to see that the game was 220 to 180, with Harry's team losing to the other team that had all older players. She thought that the youngest player on that team was at least 13, probably 14, and most of the other players were at least fifteen.

She watched with excitement as Brianna intercepted the Quaffle while the other team was passing it. She proudly watched her niece avoid the other players, as well as a Bludger, as she made her way toward the goal, flying toward the left hoop until the Keeper moved to guard it. She then quickly tossed the Quaffle into the right hoop. Minnie was positive she'd heard the Keeper use an expletive, and briefly wished she could give him detention.

At that moment, she saw Harry dive straight down toward the ground, the other Seeker in hot pursuit. She held her breath as she hoped Harry knew what he was doing as he got closer and closer toward the floor. At the last second, he turned ninety degrees and flew toward the other side of the pitch with his shoes less than an inch above the floor. The other Seeker crashed onto the magically padded floor, but everyone's eyes were on Harry, who suddenly reached out and grabbed the Golden Snitch, which had been almost directly beneath the other Seeker's original position.

As she was clapping more loudly than anybody else, she said, "What a Seeker! I wish he'd been sorted into Gryffindor!"

She walked up to Harry, saying, "Well done, Harry! Ravenclaw may win the Quidditch cup next year if they're smart enough to put you on the team!" As soon as she finished saying that, she heard Cindy start yelling about how dangerous that stunt was.

"Honestly mom, I knew the floor was padded. Look, the other Seeker is fine." When he pointed toward him, both women could see it was true as he walked in their general direction.

Cindy took a deep breath. "Just remember not to do that when the ground's not padded." She then smiled. "You were amazing, though." His mom hugged him fiercely.

"Way to go, champ!" said Mark as he walked up, putting his arm around his son. "You too, Brianna!" he added as she approached happily.

"Thanks! I didn't do anything nearly as dangerous as what Harry did." She then looked at her brother. "Not that you weren't awesome out there." She then looked back at her parents. "So can I please have a broom for my birthday?"

"We'll think about it," said Cindy after exchanging a look with her husband. She then turned her attention toward Minerva while the other players, even the opposing Seeker, complimented Harry and Brianna on their performance. "How'd it go with the lawyer?"

Minnie smiled. "He wants to interview Harry before he goes back to school. I was hoping it could be tomorrow to get it over with." Mark nodded. "Then he's going to interview as many of Snape's past and present students he can and put together a class action law suit against both Snape and Dumbledore. He hopes to bring this into court in early August."

"That's great news, Aunt Minnie!" said Cindy. "Hopefully no other student will have to put up with that man next year."

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Harry was more than happy to tell the lawyer everything he could recall about Snape's behavior, even providing some memories in Mr. Gordon's Pensieve that showed Harry's first three encounters with the greasy git.

Hermione was also very happy about the law suit as well, and told Harry to tell Mr. Gordon that she would be thrilled to participate in the case, and also told Harry she would be studying more law books. She also said she had some good news about C.A.R.E., but would rather tell Harry in person at Hogwarts. He reluctantly accepted that, figuring that he could wait one more week.

On New Year's Eve at midnight her time, and then his time, Harry and Hermione made sure they were talking to each other and toasted the New Year (with grape juice). Hermione was delighted that he'd finished reading the 'The Fellowship of the Ring' before the break was over. Before Harry knew it, and after a heartfelt goodbye, he (along with a nervous-acting Hedwig) was flooing back to Europe with Aunt Minnie, who made sure that he left his Lightning Bolt behind.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 6 – Conspiracies

As Harry was sitting at the completely empty Ravenclaw table in the Great Hall, he looked around. The four Weasleys were at the Gryffindor table, and there were a couple Hufflepuffs and Slytherins, but apparently not one Ravenclaw had elected to stay at Hogwarts for the break. The staff, including Aunt Minnie, were at the Head Table. Harry had arrived with her about an hour before, and they were waiting for the other vacationing students to arrive. He knew that they were due back any minute. Snape and Dumbledore were looking anywhere but at him.

The doors opened, drawing everyone's attention to the crowd of students that were entering the hall and separating into their houses. After about fifteen seconds, he heard a female voice call his name. After a few moments, he spotted the origin of that voice as his bushy-haired friend broke through the crowd and ran toward him.

"Hi, Hermione!" he said happily as she sat down next to him. "How was the train ride?"

"Great, except that Draco Malfoy had to visit us." She grinned, "He was awfully mad." She chuckled, "I guess he's even madder now."

Harry couldn't help smiling as she was laughing, even though he didn't know what happened. "Why was he mad?"

"You know that news about C.A.R.E. that I have?"

"Yeah."

"Mandy Brocklehurst showed her mum, who works at the Daily Prophet, all our pictures, including the one that clearly shows that Lucius Malfoy was the man beating his elf."

"So?"

She huffed impatiently, "So he doesn't want to ruin his reputation as a benevolent creep. She showed him the photos and got him to give clothes to that elf, Dobby, in exchange for keeping his face and picture out of the article she wrote about elves."

“That’s great about Dobby! Mrs. Brocklehurst wrote an article in the Daily Prophet?” Harry asked wide-eyed.

“Yes! It was a really good one! It even mentioned C.A.R.E! She’s gotten several people that want to get involved with it, at least to stop the physical abuse of elves. Of course she got some negative responses as well.”

“She didn’t get in trouble at work did she?” he asked, worried.

“No, no. Her editor feels that if there’s a major response to something, it’s a good thing. He even wants her to write a follow-up article every few months.”

“That is great!”

“We got a few hundred more members – all adults! I had to order more badges for them!”

“That’s great! Do you need some money to cover that?”

“No, enough sent the money in advance that I was able to take care of it!”

“Terrific!”

“Yeah, and Amelia Bones is drafting a bill to make House Elf abuse illegal. She’s not sure if it will pass or not, but she’s going to try. Neville Longbottom’s grandmother has a seat on the Wizengamot, and she’s actually joined C.A.R.E! A lot of the new members will be placing our literature out in their places of business – Flourish and Blotts, The Leaky Cauldron, and even a bar called the Hogg’s Head that’s located in Hogsmeade!”

He smiled broadly. “That’s wonderful!”

“Yes!” She then looked at him more closely. “You’ve got new glasses.”

His ears turned pink. “Yeah, my dad had me get my eyes checked.”

"I really like those gold frames. They match your hair, even your eyes, better than the black frames."

Whispering, he said, "Actually, the black frames match my original hair color."

Smiling and still whispering, she said, "I suppose, but I just have a hard time picturing you with dark hair. It doesn't seem right to me."

"Me neither. I've seen a few baby pictures taken before that night, but they just don't seem like me. I've always had dirty-blond hair, and I think I always will – unless I get found out." He then spoke in a normal voice as another friend approached the table. "Hey Padma! How was your Christmas?"

"Terrific! Thanks for the chocolate frogs, by the way."

"You're welcome. Hermione tells me that Draco visited on the train."

Both girls started chuckling. "Yes, he did."

Feeling left out of the joke, Harry insisted, "What happened?"

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Hermione and Padma were sitting in a compartment with Anthony Goldstein, Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbot, and Susan Bones. They were discussing their recent success with C.A.R.E. when the compartment door opened, revealing Draco and his body guards. Hermione subtly drew her wand.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" Malfoy sneered, "The mudblood and her little study group." He then glared at Hermione. "You and your little boyfriend, along with Brocklehurst, cost my family one of our servants!" He looked around. "Looks like McGonagall isn't here to protect you." He pulled his wand slowly out of a holster.

"Expelliarmus!" Hermione said, knocking Draco backward as his wand flew into the air. "Accio Wands!" All three Slytherins' wands flew into Hermione's left hand. "Looks like I don't need Harry to defend me against squibs like you," she said calmly with a smile on her face.

"I AM NOT A SQUIB, YOU MUDBLOOD!" Draco's face was red while his 'bodyguards' looked confused. Hermione's friends were laughing, though they had their wands out. "Give me our wands!"

"Susan," said Hermione with an evil smile, "Do you have your camera?"

Giggling, Susan pulled a wizarding camera out of her purse.

"Be ready to take a picture. You three goons, one at a time – Draco first – will kneel before me as Susan takes a picture. You will say, 'I, Draco Malfoy, am a squib, and Hermione Granger is my hero.'"

"I WILL NOT BOW TO A MUDBLOOD!!!!"

"Then I will snap all three of your wands, and I don't care how much detention I get! I'll tell everyone in the school what happened!"

"I'll break one of them," said Padma, "then you'll get less detention."

"I'll break the other!" said Neville, "then it won't just be Ravenclaw losing points."

Draco was breathing hard, while Crabbe and Goyle were looking at him for guidance, with fear written on their faces. "Put the camera away," he said calmly. "Then it'll be just your word against ours, you mudblood!"

"Do it," said Hermione. Susan replaced the camera in her purse with a frown. Hermione handed the wands to Neville. "You wait by the door. If Draco does it right, give him his wand as he walks out. Same goes for the other squibs."

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"And so each of them did it," said Padma, laughing, "and when they were all gone Hermione said..."

"I guess they don't know pictures can be taken inside a Pensieve."

By this time Harry was laughing so hard he almost fell off the table. He glanced over at Draco to see him glaring back. He obviously knew what they were talking about. "I wish I'd have been there! When we get those pictures, we need to send a copy to each of their dads. I'll bet they give the worst howlers this school has ever seen. Just to be certain, we'll send a note that explains that you're muggleborn. Those bigots will take that as the worst disgrace their pathetic families ever had!"

"And we'll hang a picture in the Great Hall," said Hermione.

"Not to mention our common room," said Padma. "And I'm sure Neville will want one for Gryffindor and Susan will hang one in Hufflepuff."

At about that time, food started appearing in front of them, so they tucked in.

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Later on in the Ravenclaw common room, Hermione gave Harry his second year books, and they started studying them. After about a half hour, he smiled at his best friend. "You know, over Christmas Break I heard a song about a long Quidditch match on muggle radio."

She looked at him like he'd grown a pig's tail out of his forehead. "Impossible."

"Oh yeah, it went like this.

"When I was a Seeker,

I sought both night and day

I asked the Lord to help me,

And he showed me the way."

"That is NOT a song about Quidditch, and you know it!" Hermione argued, obviously fighting the urge to laugh.

“What? Don’t you like ‘*Go tell it on a broomstick*’?”

She ignored the question and went back to her studies as he whispered,

“Over the hills and everywhere

Go tell it on a broomstick

The Quidditch game is here.”

She simply shook her head. “Boys!”

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The next day, Harry and Hermione were allowed to use Minerva’s Pensieve, for the stated purpose of sharing holiday memories. To be safe, they did share a few happy scenes that Hermione took pictures of with Susan’s camera (which she’d borrowed). Harry watched Hermione meeting her parents at the station, opening presents, and reading the ‘House Elf rights’ article in the Daily Prophet. Hermione watched Harry arrive at the airport, have the party and Quidditch game, and open presents.

Finally it was time for the memory they’d really wanted to watch. They watched the whole scene unfold until finally the part Harry had wanted to see arrived.

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With a red face and a look that could have burned through a wall, Draco stood in front of Hermione and slowly got on his knees.

“IsqbHrGrhro,” he said quickly and got up.

“Where are you going, you filthy squib?” she said, getting into the part. “Speak slowly and clearly if you don’t want your wand broken. Now get back on your knees.”

“Fine, you filthy...” At that moment Hermione did a hex that covered Draco with mud.

As he looked at himself in disgust, Hermione said, "Don't call me filthy. It could have been manure instead of mud. Now, since I don't want your filth on me..." She scourgified him and pocketed her wand. "Now, bow!"

He complied and said, "I, Draco Mal..."

"Louder!"

"Fine! I, Draco Malfoy am a squib, and Hermione Granger is my hero," he said through gritted teeth."

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Harry laughed hysterically as Hermione snapped the pictures of Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle all bowing to her.

-

Harry arrived at the owlry extremely early one morning with four envelopes in his pocket. He knew that Hedwig would get jealous if he sent a package with a different owl than her, but he didn't want to send his beloved pet into the home of Malfoy, Crabbe, or Goyle. She immediately flew onto his shoulder.

As he petted her, he said, "Hi girl. How are you doing?" He gave her an owl treat and pulled an envelope addressed to Quality Quidditch Supplies. He decided to order a pair of Seeker gloves, as well as a Snitch. He had a plan about how to sneak his broom into Hogwarts that Brianna had already started. He wanted to practice this term. He tied the order form to Hedwig's leg and sent her away.

Once she was out of sight, he called down three school owls and sent a picture of each of their sons bowing to Hermione, who was identified simply as a muggleborn. Harry loved the way the magical picture showed them keep kneeling before her over and over. He chuckled at the thought of the reactions those fathers would have.

The same day, the Weasley twins got a Slytherin in their year who can't stand Draco and his goons to stick the photos to the bulletin board in their dormitory with a variation of the sticking charm that the

twins had invented. No teacher had yet unstuck anything they'd used that charm on. The only problem with it was that it only lasted twenty-four-hours. Harry felt that was plenty of time for every Slytherin to see it.

Ravenclaw would keep the photos up for the rest of the year. Penny promised that no Ravenclaw prefect would pull the picture down, and they didn't think the Hufflepuff prefects would either. Gryffindor, however was different because of one prefect – Percy Weasley. Fred and George decided to use the same sticking charm that was being done in the Slytherin dorm.

It was decided that a picture in the Great Hall would be pointless since every student would see it anyway. The cover story they came up with was that the three Slytherins were asking Hermione to date them. Since no wands were shown in the photos, they couldn't prove that anyone was forcing them to bow. Draco knew that if he insisted on using a Pensieve, he'd be the one in trouble. He made up a ridiculous story about begging the mudblood not to touch them.

-

At breakfast that morning, Harry noticed that Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle were sitting alone at one end of the table, and getting glared at by most of the other Slytherins. He also noticed that Draco was glaring at Hermione, and he promised himself to be ready to defend his friend. While he was thinking about this, an owl landed in front of him. After removing the letter from the bird, he found out that he'd received a letter from Sam Gordon, the lawyer. He quickly opened the envelope and read it.

"Dear Mr. McGonagall,

I thought I'd let you know that I'm currently in Europe. I have associated myself with a local lawyer named Matthew Marcus. I've sent your aunt more details. I just thought I'd let you know in case he contacts you. I've interviewed a few of Mr. Snape's former students, and they all agree with you and your aunt about him. You'll hear from me before Easter break.

Sincerely,

Sam Gordan."

As Harry was pocketing that note, another package arrived for him. Before he could open it, however, three howlers arrived at the Slytherin table. Draco received the first.

A calm, yet clearly displeased voice said, "*Draco, I have just received a photograph of you kneeling before the Granger girl. We WILL speak of this during your next break from school.*" Draco's already pale face got even whiter.

The next howler arrived in front of Goyle. It wasn't calm. "*HOW COULD YOU, A PUREBLOOD, KNEEL TO A MUDBLOOD!?! DON'T YOU HAVE ANY PRIDE? I AUGHT TO CRUCIO YOU!*"

The third one went to Crabbe. "*WHY WERE YOU ON YOUR KNEES IN FRONT OF THAT FILTHY MUDBLOOD!?! I TOLD YOU THAT THEY SHOULD BOW TO US!*"

Smiling to himself, Harry picked up the other package that he'd gotten. It was from Brianna, and he knew what it was. He was about to open it when his aunt stood behind him.

"Hello Harry."

"Hi Aun, Professor McGonagall. Is there something I can do for you?"

With a half-smile, she said, "Yes. Open that package from Brianna. It looks like it's the size of your broom's case."

He looked at her with an innocent expression as Hermione kept silently eating her breakfast. "Why would she send me my Lightning Bolt? She probably wants to sneak it out and fly herself."

"Because her brother can provide her with a lot of Galleons. Open up the package."

He shrugged his shoulders and opened it up, revealing a small cardboard box containing a Superman action figure. He shook his head in anger. "I told her to send Spider-Man! Can she ever get it right?" He pulled out the toy and handed it to his aunt.

"I apologize. I was convinced you were sneaking your broomstick here."

"It may not be a broomstick, but I can get him to fly." He then levitated the action figure and had Superman fly a quick lap around the table.

With a small smile, Minerva said, "From now on leave your toys in Ravenclaw Tower. I have to prepare for class. I'll see you later."

After the professor had left, Hermione looked at Harry. "I was convinced it was your broom, too."

He smiled slyly at her. "Not yet." Her eyes widened at this pronouncement. He quickly changed the subject. "I finished 'Return of the King' last night. That scene in the volcano was great! I thought Frodo was gonna..."

He succeeded in temporarily distracting Hermione. He'd tell her his plans, but not in the middle of the Great Hall.

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Later that day, Harry pulled out his mirror to call his sister. Once he saw her face, he said, "Phase one complete. Thanks a lot."

"Don't thank me, Big Brother. Just send money. It costs to ship things this way. First I pay for international floo mail and then for owling the package to Hogwarts."

"Don't worry, Brianna. You'll be paid once I get my Lightning Bolt."

"I'd better," she said with a grin.

"I told Aunt Minnie you were shipping Spider-Man next."

"Ok. Expect him in a few days."

"Once I've gotten a package she doesn't inspect..."

"Then I'll have to send the Lightning Bolt."

Harry smiled broadly. "I can't wait! I'll talk to you later."

“Bye Harry.”

“Bye Sis.”

“Harry?” said the voice of Hermione from behind him. “You are going to...”

“Shhh. Can we talk quietly?”

“Fine.” She looked worried.

“Yes, I am gonna sneak my broom here.”

“But what about...”

“No one’s gonna catch me. I’ll be flying where no one can see me. I need you to keep this a secret. I was gonna tell you about it. I thought you might want to have a go on my Lightning Bolt. It’s a lot better than the school brooms.”

As a smile formed on her face, she said, “According to Flyfree’s Quidditch Encyclopedia, our school brooms were donated to Hogwarts while your aunt was a student.”

-

The weeks went by quickly after that, and two more packages arrived from Brianna. Minerva did not inspect the second of those two, so he told Brianna to send the broomstick. She’d told him that she’d gotten one of her magical friend’s older brothers to transfigure a rock into a good imitation of the Lightning Bolt case, and had switched it with the real one. She was ready to mail it.

-

Harry did some very minor Transfiguration on his Superman action figure, changing the colors, and carried it to breakfast in a wrapped package on the morning of the Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff Quidditch match. While he was eating his bacon and eggs, another owl from Brianna arrived.

"She's still sending you more dolls, Harry," asked Professor McGonagall from behind him.

Harry jumped slightly. "Oh, Aun...Professor. You scared me. Yeah. Brianna sent me the wrong one last time. And they're Action Figures, not dolls."

"I stand correc..."

"Sorry, Professor McGonagall!" said Hermione as she 'accidentally' spilled her drink onto her shoe. "Let me help you."

As Hermione grabbed a napkin and wiped pumpkin juice off of the Deputy Headmistress' shoes, Harry switched the package that had just arrived with the package he'd brought with him. His aunt didn't see him sneak the box into his pocket. He then opened the package and said, "Good. She sent Camouflage Superman." He showed off his Superman figure with green and tan instead of blue and red. "It's for when he's flying in a forest so no one knows he's there."

"Of course," said Minerva indulgently, knowing that toy manufacturers do make slight modifications to sell multiple copies of the same thing to children. "He certainly wouldn't want to be caught."

"Exactly!" he said with mock enthusiasm. He then put it in a different pocket. "I know I can't play with it here. I don't think I'll need anymore."

"That's good. Carry on. I need to make sure Gryffindor's team shows up." She sighed. "Harry, I really wish you were a Gryffindor. I just know you'd catch the Snitch. The Seeker we've got couldn't...Never mind. I'll see you later Harry, Hermione."

"Bye. Good luck. We'll be rooting for Gryffindor."

"I'm sorry again, Professor," said Hermione repentantly.

"It's quite alright, Hermione. Everybody spills their drink on occasion."

Once Minerva was gone, Hermione looked at her best friend and whispered, "I can't believe I let you talk me into doing that! I was sure I was going to lose house points! And I'd have deserved it!"

"If it had been Snape, he'd have had you executed," said Harry with a smirk.

"Or worse – expelled!" she said before a smile crossed her lips. Harry chuckled. "Seriously, this isn't a joking matter. I purposely spilled pumpkin juice on my favorite professor to provide a distraction so you could break another school rule. We could both be big trouble."

Harry took a deep breath. "Hermione, I promise that if I'm caught, I won't bring your name into this. Thank you very much for helping me."

She sighed. "You're welcome, I suppose."

"Are you still gonna help us tonight?"

"Of course. Filch deserves it. Besides, Fred and George will be with us, and they never get caught, right?"

"Not anytime this term."

"Okay, I hope."

"I guess we should hurry up if we want to get good seats."

-

Harry and Hermione sat in the bleachers watching the game, realizing that aside from a pathetic Seeker, Gryffindor's team was better than Hufflepuff's. Five minutes into the game, Harry pointed his finger. "There's the Snitch, Hermione! Why aren't the Seeker's going after it?"

She squinted in the direction her best friend was pointing. "Oh, you're right! I guess they don't see it."

“Now it’s gone! What’s wrong with those idiots? Are they wearing blindfolds out there? Aunt Minnie was right!” Harry was obviously frustrated. “That Seeker wouldn’t catch the Snitch if it flew up his...”

“Harry, language!” She then tried to calm her friend down. “At least Gryffindor’s Chasers are doing well. The score is...What’s going on in the stands over there?”

Harry looked where Hermione was pointing and saw that a fight had broken out. He pulled out a pair of binoculars and soon observed, “It looks like Draco, Crabbe and Goyle are fighting Neville and I think Ron Weasley. Oh look. A few more Gryffindors have gotten involved. Uh oh. Some of the older Slytherins are joining too.”

For about five more minutes, more and more Gryffindors and Slytherins were joining the fight until finally Professor Dumbledore approached the area. His normal eye twinkle was missing. Minerva looked like she wanted to leave her post next to Lee Jordan, but knew that someone needed to keep the commentator from showing too much bias. The fight was over very quickly, and all of the participants marched quietly off the stands as Hermione watched through Harry’s binoculars. He started watching the game once the fight was over.

After a while, Harry said, “Hermione, the game is over. The Snitch appeared right next to the Hufflepuff Seeker. She caught it but Gryffindor won. One-hundred-sixty to one-hundred-fifty points.”

“Oh, well I guess we should be going now.”

“Off the stands anyway,” said Harry mysteriously.

-

Once they were on the ground, Harry looked at Hermione. “You go on back. I’m gonna try out my Lightning Bolt.”

“But you’ll get caught, Harry.”

He smiled. “Not in the forest.”

“But it’s forbidden for a reason. There are all kinds of dangerous animals, not to mention werewolves.”

“I’ll be fine, I promise. Go to the dorm. I won’t be that long.”

“If you’re determined...”

“I am.”

“Then I’m coming with you. It’s been a long time since I’ve been on a broom.”

Harry’s jaw dropped. “But you...”

“If you do run into trouble, two wands are better than one, right?”

“If you insist.”

-

They carefully made their way into the forest without anyone seeing them. They quickly found a clearing and Harry opened the package Brianna had really sent him that day. Hermione picked up the cardboard box Harry had thrown on the ground and put it in her pocket. Harry placed the case on the ground. “Watch this.”

Hermione was mesmerized as she watched the case expand and become clear. He opened it, pulled out his broom, and reshunk it. Then he put the case in his pocket. He was going to mount it, but then decided to be considerate. “Would you like to try it first?”

“Well, if you don’t mind. But it is your...”

“Then fly it. I have already used it.”

“Thanks.” She put her hand over it. “Up!” she exclaimed, and it went straight into her hand. She took off immediately, enjoying herself immensely thanks to the help Harry had given her during their flying lesson those months ago. She didn’t do any stunts like Harry enjoyed, but she flew between the trees for a good ten minutes before landing

next to Harry, smiling broadly. "That was fun! This broom is easier than the school brooms."

"I know," he agreed as he took off on his broom, doing loops and dives, scaring Hermione as he convinced her he'd lost his mind.

When he finally landed, she started on him immediately. "Are you mad? That was dangerous!"

"It was fun! I haven't even started using my Snitch yet. Do you want to ride with me?"

"Not if you're doing that, I don't."

"I promise not to flip or dive. Will that make you happy?"

She took a deep breath. "I suppose."

She got on behind him and wrapped her arms around his waste. He took off.

True to his word, he didn't do any dangerous stunts as they enjoyed the wind blowing through their hair. After they'd been up ten minutes, they noticed an angry Snape talking to a terrified Quirrel nearby. Harry flew a bit closer to listen, but made sure no one could see them.

"...Students aren't supposed to know about the Philosopher's Stone, after all," said the greasy-haired git as Hermione softly gasped behind Harry.

Quirrel seemed to have mumbled something, but Harry and Hermione couldn't hear.

"Have you found a way to get past that three-headed dog of Hagrid's yet?"

"B-b-but Severus, I..."

"You don't want me as your enemy, Quirrell," said Snape, taking a step toward him.

"I-I don't know what you..."

“You know perfectly well what I mean.”

At that moment, an owl on the opposite side of the professors hooted, drawing their attention. Hermione whispered, “Let’s go now before we’re caught!” Harry complied and they quickly made it to their clearing and Harry put the broom in its case. Hermione insisted they run back into the castle. She didn’t speak until they were in the library. “Get us a private table. I’ll be right back.”

“Okay,” Harry said, confused. He had no idea why they were there.

A few minutes later, Hermione found him. She was carrying a huge book, and was flipping through the pages as she walked. When she got to their table, she put the open book down in front of Harry, smiled, and pointed at an entry.

He whispered what was written there. “The Philosopher’s Stone! That’s what the three-headed dog is guarding!” Harry and Hermione went on to read the details, including the fact that a man named Nicolas Flamel was the only known maker of the unique stone. While they were still in the library, Harry remembered that he’d seen Flamel’s name on Dumbledore’s chocolate frog card and was sure they were friends.

“Do you think we should tell your aunt that Snape wants to steal it?”

Harry looked thoughtful for a few seconds. “Probably not. She’d ask us how we know and take away my broom. Besides, she already doesn’t trust Snape. She’s probably onto him now.”

-

That night, at exactly one a.m., both Harry and Hermione snuck into their common room, which thankfully was empty, and out the door. (Al the portrait was sleeping.) They walked into the nearest classroom, and were relieved to find a pair of twin redheads waiting for them.

George Weasley was looking down at an old piece of parchment while Fred whispered. “Are you two ready?”

"Of course," whispered Hermione. "Why would we be here if we weren't?"

"Is it clear, Forge?"

"All clear, Gred."

"What's he looking at?" asked Harry.

"How does he know it's clear?" added Hermione.

"Trade secret," both twins said together.

"Come one," said Harry. "We're all in this together. It's only fair. You know my secret."

"We could show them."

"It's not like they could get into Gryffindor Tower to take it."

"And we are working together."

"I suppose."

Together the twins said, "This is the Marauders' Map." They then explained what it did and where they got it from while the others stared at the map in amazement.

"So that's how you knew my secret," said Harry.

"Exactly," they said together.

They soon carefully walked to their destination with George making sure no one caught them. They got to the closet Filch kept his cleaning supplies in and Harry magically unlocked it. Fred passed a small vial to both Hermione and Harry, and handed two types of cleaning fluids to each. "You know what to do."

While George watched the map, Harry and Hermione emptied their vials into the bottles they'd been given. Fred performed a spell on the mop bucket. It took less than sixty seconds.

“He’s coming!” George announced.

“We’re done. Let’s get out of here. We’ll see the results of our work tomorrow.”

The twins kindly guided the Ravenclaws back to their portrait and left.

Al didn’t appreciate being woken up, but let them in, saying it wasn’t his job to make sure they followed curfew. He then winked at them, which caused them to blush. They did hear him mutter something about them being a bit young as they closed the door.

“Goodnight, Hermione.”

“Goodnight, Harry.”

-

The next morning, everybody saw the results of their prank. The floor in the halls and classrooms had random stripes of various bright colors spread out. Many people thought it looked great. The prank was that it would go away by itself if it was left alone for twelve hours. However, Filch himself was spreading the colors around with his mop. They simply didn’t show up until a half-hour after it dried. The more he’d clean, the longer it would stay.

As they approached the Great Hall, they saw Percy Weasley yelling at a first-year girl for saying that the floors looked better than before. The Great Hall was no different, although Dumbledore seemed to enjoy looking at the results of the prank. Snape was unhappily attempting to remove the colors from the floor in one corner of the hall. He quickly got frustrated and sat down to breakfast.

Filch was looking at the Headmaster, apparently oblivious to the fact that Albus found it amusing. “It wasn’t like this when I finished mopping professor, I swear! I can’t wait to catch the kids who did it! Probably the Weasley twins! I wanna see some punishment! I’ve still got the old chains oiled in my office.” He then went to a corner with his mop and bucket trying to clean the color off all in the hall again.

Harry whispered in Hermione's ear. "I wonder how long Filch will spend trying to remove it before he leaves it alone."

"He'll wonder what's wrong when it disappears this afternoon at every place but where he's cleaning." They both laughed as they sat down at Ravenclaw table and tucked in to breakfast at what was promising to be an amusing day.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 7 – Surprises

That night, Filch decided to concentrate on cleaning only the Great Hall after he'd tried unsuccessfully cleaning the other halls of the castle. He figured that he'd have to clean up the floors one room at a time for the rest of term because of the prank that had been played.

The next morning, on the way to breakfast, all the students noticed that the floors were back to normal everywhere except the Great Hall. As they sat down to eat, they noticed Filch mopping the floor, looking completely exhausted.

"I wonder if he knows that everywhere else is clean," whispered Harry to Hermione at the Ravenclaw table.

"I doubt it. I don't think anyone likes him enough to let him know."

Grinning, Harry replied, "Probably true. Besides, others probably think he managed to clean it up last night and this is the only room he has left to clean."

-

Argus wound up working on that room for over thirty straight hours until he passed out in exhaustion in the middle of the night. The next morning, the Hogwarts staff found him unconscious on the finally clean floor next to his mop and bucket.

Dumbledore woke him up as students began filling the hall. "Mr. Filch, I must congratulate you on a job well done. The entire castle has been restored. But you must take better care of yourself. I suggest you take the day off and see Madam Pomfrey to make sure you're alright, and spend the day relaxing."

Filch, who knew he hadn't managed to clean up the castle himself but was unwilling to admit it, said, "I suppose I did work too hard last night. If I ever find out who did it..."

"Now, now, Mr. Filch. We are investigating the matter. You should simply relax."

Filch picked up his mop to find that the spot directly beneath it was still colored from the prank. "I guess I missed a spot," he said, and then proceeded to wipe that section of the floor with his mop. The result was that the formerly restored section of the floor began changing colors again. He glared at the floor and then his mop. He swore loudly, calling into question the chastity of the mop's mother. Most of the students started laughing loudly while others, such as Hermione, looked horrified.

"Language, Mr. Filch," said Dumbledore sternly. "You don't want to be a bad example for the students, do you?"

Harry, who overheard that, whispered to his best friend, "Like having Snape here raping everybody's mind is a good example!"

Hermione nodded, though she did say, "It's still not good for faculty members to use foul language..."

"But it's worse to treat students in a foul manner," said Padma, who was sitting next to them.

"True," agreed Hermione. "In any case, we have to get going. Class will be starting in ten minutes."

-

The weeks passed quickly, with Harry sneaking around to practice with his broom and Snitch at least once every week. On Valentine's Day, Harry sent Hermione, Minerva, Penny, and the other girls in their study group each a card with Hedwig. Hermione blushed when she noticed that hers was the best. It was nicer material than the others. She decided to give him the one she'd prepared but wouldn't have given him if he hadn't given her one first. Both of them were simply friendship Valentines, but they each were glad the other had thought of them.

Soon it was March 8th – Brianna's tenth birthday. Harry had known in advance what their parents were buying her, and sent a gift that went along with it. Hermione had sent her a set of books with Harry's present. It was a Saturday. When it was late enough, Harry and

Hermione called Brianna on his mirror from a quiet corner of the Common Room.

“Hi Brianna!” said Harry when her happy face appeared.

“Hi Harry, Hermione.”

“Hi Brianna,” said the bushy-haired girl.

“We just called to say...” said Harry.

He and Hermione began singing, ‘Happy Birthday to you,’ and Hermione slapped his arm after Harry sang as the second line, “You belong in the zoo.”

“You know the real words,” said Hermione sternly while Brianna enjoyed watching Harry’s reaction to getting hit.

“Oh, come on! She did that at my party...”

“But you’re supposed to be the older, more mature sibling.”

“But...but...fine. I’ll sing it right!” He gave in while looking at his best friend’s determined face. He realized he was fighting a losing battle. Together, they sang the song correctly as Brianna laughed at her big brother.

“She really does have you wrapped around her finger, Harry. If you’re already this whipped now, imagine when you start kissing. Unless you’ve already...”

“We are NOT kissing!” said both of the blushing Ravenclaws together.

Nonplussed, Brianna responded, “Not yet anyway.”

“Have you kissed Bobby yet?” asked Harry, effectively stopping that line of questioning. “Mom said he’s coming to your party tonight.”

“HE’S MY FRIEND!”

Chuckling, Harry said, “It is rare that mentioning a friend’s name can cause your face to turn red. Mentioning Angie doesn’t do that.”

“Shut up! Remember our deal?”

“You started it, sis, but since it’s your birthday, I’ll stop if you will.”

“Fine.”

“Have you opened any presents yet?” asked Hermione.

Brianna’s face lit up. “Yeah! Thanks for that set of the ‘*Chronicles of Narnia*!’ Did that happen, too, like ‘*Lord of the Rings*?’”

“No, I’m afraid not. Although that wardrobe reminds me of a vanishing cabinet,” she said thoughtfully.

“Did you open what mom and dad got you?” asked Harry.

“Of course,” she said smugly. “You already knew about it.”

“Not the exact model. Did they get you a Lightning Bolt?”

“No, they didn’t want any confusion. Besides, I like mine better. It’s the Silver Bullet!” she said, no longer hiding her excitement.

“The one named after the Lone Ranger?” he asked, acting disgusted.

“The one that’s silver and can fly faster than your broom!”

He smiled, knowing that hers had a slightly higher maximum speed, but his had faster acceleration. “Can not.”

“Can too!”

“Mine accelerates faster! That’s most important!”

“If you’re a Seeker, maybe. But I’m a Chaser. I need to grab the Quaffle and fly too fast for anyone to steal it from me! Thanks for that Quaffle, by the way.”

“Sure. Now all we need are a few Bludgers.”

“No thank you! Oh, we almost got in major trouble! We’re going to Frank’s Flying Funhouse tomorrow and Dad suggested letting one of

my friends borrow your broom. I told him you'd be mad. I think I convinced him."

"I hope so!" he said, panic written on his face. "Tell them you mentioned it to me and I started yelling."

"Will do. I've gotta go. We're going out to lunch. Bye guys!"

"Bye," said both Harry and Hermione as Brianna's image faded.

"That really put me in the mood for flying," said Harry. "You wanna come?"

"Harry, it's getting late. I don't think it's a good idea. Curfew is in an hour."

"Come on, Hermione. You know you enjoy sneaking around the castle," he said with a smirk.

"That's when the Weasley twins are with us, and we're using the map. Besides, I for one don't want to wander about the Forbidden Forest when it's dark."

He sighed in defeat. "Okay. We'll go tomorrow. Have a good night." He turned to go to his room.

"Alright, we'll go then," said Hermione with a smile, knowing that she really did have him wrapped around her finger.

"Go where?" asked Padma, who had snuck up behind her.

They glanced nervously at each other. "Nowhere," said Harry.

"Come on. You guys have all the fun. I know you two did that floor prank on Filch. I want in on whatever you're up to."

"We're not pulling a prank," Hermione whispered.

Padma's eyes widened. "You-you're not sneaking off to a broom closet are you? My mum said we're way too young..."

“We’re not doing that. We’re...” Harry looked around and whispered, “Tomorrow we’re sneaking out to the forest to ride the broom I snuck in here.”

Padma’s eyes brightened. “You snuck a broom here? Awesome! Please let me go with you. I’d love to try flying something besides the school brooms!”

He shrugged his shoulders and looked at Hermione, who nodded. “Alright,” he answered.

-

The next day after lunch, Harry got his broom in its shrunken case and walked out the door and outside the castle into their clearing in the forest with both Hermione and Padma. That time, he let Padma ride the broom first.

“Thanks a lot, Harry!” she said as she excitedly mounted the broom and flew away. Harry re-shrunk the case and put it in his pocket.

“You really do follow the ‘Ladies first’ rule, don’t you?” asked Hermione with a grin.

“With the exception of my sister, yes. My dad taught...”

At that moment they heard some sort of animal nearby crying out in pain.

“What was that?” said a scared-looking Hermione.

“It sounded like a horse. Let’s go!” Wands in hand, both kids charged headlong through the trees toward the sound. What they saw was horrifying.

A beautiful silver-white stallion with a horn protruding out of its snout was lying on its side, bleeding from a deep cut in its throat. Something or someone with a black cloak that appeared to be floating toward the unicorn noticed them and turned.

“Ahhh!” screamed Harry as he fell to his knees, clutching his forehead.

Hermione's eyes widened as she realized the implications of Harry reacting that way. Slightly trembling, she pointed her wand at the unicorn's killer that was still approaching slowly.

"Expelliarmus!" she shouted, causing a red beam to shoot from her wand and hit the attacker's face. He was pushed backwards about a foot, and continued moving toward them.

"Hermione!" came Padma's voice from above them where she was flying. She looked terrified, but was pointing her wand at the attacker as well. It looked up at the flier while Hermione shot it again. If Voldemort had been in Quirrel's body at the time, and not in this sub-human form, he would've killed all three children. As it was, he knew he couldn't defend himself from them. He briefly wondered if the boy suffered from some form of epilepsy and was having a seizure.

As Hermione continued to hold him back, Padma lowered the broom behind her and managed to get Harry on it. When Padma said, "Now!" Hermione jumped on the broom and they flew away. Even at their small sizes they barely fit on the broom handle, and were moving noticeably slower than usual. However, they managed to get out of the forest as Harry came to himself. Padma landed them in a secluded spot outside the forest and Harry put the broom back into its case.

"What happened, Harry?" she asked in concern. "Who was that?"

Harry and Hermione exchanged a knowing look. "I don't know," he said.

Padma looked from Harry to Hermione and knew she was being lied to. "Come on. I know you know!"

Hermione said, "You'll be happier not knowing what we suspect."

"I saved you, admittedly with Harry's broom. Don't I have the right to know what I saved you from?"

Harry took a deep breath. "Voldemort."

She gasped and flinched at the name. "W-why do you th-think that. He was killed by Harry Potter. W-Why would he be here?"

"The Philosopher's Stone," said Hermione, with comprehension dawning on her face.

"The elixir of life," said Harry, finishing her thought. He turned to their friend who looked even more confused than ever. "He didn't die. They never found a body. He was weakened and lost his powers. He's looking for a way to come back."

Hermione continued. "We overheard Snape and Quirrel talking about the Philosopher's Stone being here. Actually, Snape was threatening Quirrel, talking about the three-headed dog on the third floor that's guarding a trap door. Anyway, we looked up what the Philosopher's Stone was."

"It can turn any metal into gold, and produces the elixir of life, which can make the drinker immortal. It could let Voldemort come back," finished Harry.

Padma flinched again. "So why would he be killing a unicorn?"

Hermione answered, "I don't know, but I know where we can find out."

-

An hour later, they were in the library looking up unicorns in various books when Hermione exclaimed, "I've found it!"

"Shhh," said Harry, "Do you want us thrown out?"

"Sorry. I just got excited. It says here that drinking unicorn blood will keep someone alive no matter how close to death they are, but it will give them a cursed half-life. I'd guess that he's just surviving on that until he can get his hands on the stone."

"So what can we do about it?" asked Padma.

"Tell my Aunt."

“But then you’ll have to admit being in the forest.”

He swore under his breath as he tried to think of a way around that. “I could tell her about...Quirrel – not Snape!”

Comprehension dawned on Hermione’s face while confusion formed on Padma’s.

“Snape’s a mind-rapist and an evil git who should be sacked, but Quirrel’s the one working with Voldemort,” Hermione finished his thought. “So he was trying to get past the dog – not Snape.”

“What?” said Patil. “Quirrel wouldn’t have the guts. Why would you suspect him anyway?”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other, knowing that if they explained how Harry’s invisible scar hurt when he was with Quirrel and then when he was with Voldemort, they’d be revealing his secret. They also knew she could tell when she was being lied to.

“Padma,” said Harry, “I won’t lie to you. The answer to that question is a secret that I can’t tell you.”

“But you can tell Hermione?” she asked, looking offended.

“No. I figured it out.”

“How?” The smart Patil twin started thinking about Quirrel, trying to figure out why Harry suspects him. “Is this about the headaches Harry sometimes gets in class?” Judging by how uncomfortable her friends looked, she knew she was on the right track. “Your head hurt today, too. So something about Quirrel and You-Know-Who gives you headaches.” She turned to Harry. “Are you a Seer or something?”

“Something,” said Harry with a worried look on his face. “Please don’t ask more. It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s that I can’t tell anyone.”

“But if I figure it out like Hermione...”

“Please don’t try,” he looked at her imploringly.

Sighing, she said, "Okay. For now I won't try to figure out your secret, but this isn't over."

"Fair enough," said Harry with a grin.

-

A few hours later, Harry was alone in Minerva's office talking to her.

"I think there's something wrong with Quirrel, Aunt Minnie."

She looked surprised. "I know he's a bit timid, but he's a fine man."

"That's not what I mean. A lot of times when I'm in class with him, my head hurts here for a few seconds." Harry traced a lightning bolt shape on his forehead, surprising his aunt by tracing the exact location of his erased scar.

"Your scar?"

"That's how Hermione figured out who I am. I was rubbing it. I've been careful since then to just rub my whole forehead when it happens. I feel at least a small twinge almost every class. I thought it would go away, but it hasn't. I was wondering if...if it could have something to do with Voldemort." She flinched at the name. "But I mean, there's no reason he'd want to be here, is there?"

Harry enjoyed watching his aunt's face pale at that question. He knew she wouldn't tell him the answer to that question. "Er, I'm s-sure that you're safe. I'll...I'll look into it. Be careful."

"Thanks, Aunt Minnie." He got up to leave, and she pulled him into a tight hug. "Don't be alone with him, Harry. Make sure one of your friends is with you. Try not to call any attention to yourself in his class, and try to pretend your head's not hurting."

"I will, Aunt Minnie."

As he left the office, he knew that he'd done the right thing by talking to her.

-

Harry knew that his aunt couldn't tell Dumbledore about Quirrel without revealing their secret, but he did notice that now Snape wasn't the only one harassing the stuttering professor. Of course, she was being much more subtle about it. She'd seem to appear out of thin air whenever Quirrel's classes were ending. She'd act friendly, but Harry could see that she was escorting him so he couldn't sneak off anywhere.

He also noticed that she always had her hand on her wand. That made him decide what to order for her upcoming birthday, which would occur during Easter break. They were staying at the castle for that, and Harry was arranging a small surprise for her.

-

As Easter break approached, Hermione seemed to get very obsessed with reviewing for their end-of-term exams, and had just handed Harry a study schedule. He certainly didn't want to hurt his best friend's feelings, but he honestly felt that they didn't need that much time for reviewing it.

"Hermione, thank you for this schedule," he began.

"You're welcome, Harry."

"But I honestly don't think we need to spend that much time reviewing. We're over half-way through next year's books."

"But it never hurts to be prepared."

"I agree with you there, but I think we both know the material well enough. How about if instead of going over our notes we quiz each other right now to see how much we need to study?"

Intrigued by the idea, Hermione agreed. Harry picked up his Potions book and went to the review questions of one of the last chapters and asked one of them. She answered it perfectly. She then picked a question for him out of the Herbology book, which he got right. For over an hour, they quizzed each other on every subject they were

studying, and demonstrated all the spells that came up (they didn't demonstrate Potions and plants) in the questions.

Finally, Harry said, "You see. I think that if we quiz each other like this every week, we'll be fine. I really think we should give the study schedules to our study group, though. I think we could spend the extra time either helping them or finishing up the second year books."

Seeing that he was right, she nodded. "I guess so. Maybe I did get a bit carried away."

He smiled at her. "You sometimes forget how brilliant you are, but I don't."

She blushed at the compliment. "You're just as brilliant..."

Shaking his head, he admitted, "Not quite, but hanging out with you has made me smarter." For some reason he felt like telling her how much he appreciated her. He knew she still had some self-esteem problems from before they'd met and wanted to make sure that she knew he thought she was brilliant.

"You are so sweet." She hugged him and did her best not to cry at his kind words.

"It's just the truth."

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When Easter break finally arrived, they decided to spend two hours per day playing games. Harry had decided against flying around the forest, for obvious reasons, so they decided to play some board games that Hermione had gotten her parents to send them.

On Monday, Harry, Hermione, and Padma were playing a game of Monopoly, with Hermione as banker and Harry as property manager, when Harry voiced a concern he'd had growing for a while.

"I wonder if Quirrel knows how to get past that dog yet."

"I don't think he's had the chance to try. I honestly don't think he's gone to the loo without your aunt knowing." He chuckled. "I'm more concerned about what else is guarding it. Any muggle with a gun could get past the three-headed dog."

"You're right. Just shoot each head. You might want a semi-automatic weapon at least," commented Harry.

"What about the death curse?" suggested Padma.

"Some magical beasts might be immune. Maybe," said Harry.

"But not to every curse," said Hermione confidently. "I'll bet a few 'reducto' curses would do it." She then looked at Padma and explained. "That's a fifth-year spell that can break solid walls."

"Oh."

"I hope there are worse things guarding the stone than just that monster," said Harry.

"I'll bet Hagrid would know, since he's helping to guard it," said Hermione.

"I'm sure it's not guarded with anything we could get past," said Padma.

"Maybe, but I'd like to make sure," said Harry. "I've read about what it was like when Voldemort was around, and would not like to experience that first hand."

"Me neither. Why don't we go now?" said Hermione.

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Thirty minutes later, they found themselves standing outside Hagrid's cabin. The windows all were shuttered closed. Harry nervously knocked on the door.

They heard something drop on the floor, followed by a loud voice saying, "Just a minute."

They listened to the sounds of things being moved around until finally the door opened. Hagrid's dog immediately started licking Harry as Hagrid said, "Hello, er, Harry McGonagall, right?" He nodded. "Yeah, yer aunt mentioned you a couple times over de years. I was surprised yer were sorted inter Ravenclaw, but the hat's always right, isn't he." Looking at the girls, he asked, "And who might yer be?"

"I'm Hermione Granger, and this is Padma Patil. We heard that you know about every magical creature there is, and we have a question about one."

They could see the half-giant blush through his beard. "Well, I do know 'bout most o' dem, yes. Please come in. We'll have a spot of tea."

As they walked in, Harry noticed that it was very hot in there, and a large garbage can had been put in front of the fireplace. They sat down at his table.

"So, how long have you been working here?" asked Harry, making small talk while Hagrid fiddled around with the tea kettle.

"Almost fifty years now. Since Dumbledore talked the headmaster at that time into hiring me. Great man, Dumbledore."

"I'll bet you know everything that goes on here," said Hermione.

"Pretty much," he answered proudly as he set out the cups of tea. "If I'd known ye were comin' I'd a made some rock cakes."

"We heard that there's a three-headed dog guarding something in the castle," said Harry.

"And we wanted to know if it's true," added Padma.

"How'd ye hear about Fluffy? Wait. I don' want ter know."

"Fluffy?"

"Well, he's got ter have a name, don't he?"

“How do you know his name?” asked Harry, already knowing the answer.

“He’s mine.”

“So, what’s he guarding?” asked Hermione innocently.

“Sorry. Can’ tell ya he’s guarding the Phil...can’t say what he’s guarding.”

Harry had to bite his tongue to stop himself from laughing at Hagrid’s near slip-up. He found that he liked the rather large man, but he would never tell him a secret.

“Whatever it is must be really important for Professor Dumbledore to have trusted you to guard it. I wonder if there’s anyone else he’s trusted as much,” said Padma.

Hagrid smiled proudly. “He’s only trusted a handful as much as me. Let’s see. He of course trusts your aunt, Harry. He trusts Professors Sprout, Quirrel, Flitwick, an’ Snape. I understand you’ve ‘ad some trouble wit’ him, and I admit he’s not the most pleasant bloke I ever met, but Dumbledore trusts him. You should too. Great man, Dumbledore. They’re all guarding the...thing they’re guarding. Of course, Dumbledore has somethin’ too. Bit excessive, if ya ask me. Ain’t nuthin’ can get past Fluffy.”

The trio smiled broadly. Hermione decided that it would be rude to leave as soon as they got the information they wanted. “Thanks Hagrid. So tell me, what other interesting creatures are around here?” He then talked to them for another hour, talking about hippogriffs, thestrals, acromantulas, and finally his favorite.

“I always wanted ter own a dragon,” he said happily as he got up and removed the large garbage can from in front of his fireplace, “...and now I got me one.”

They looked in surprise to see something they did not expect. “Is that a dragon egg?” asked Hermione.

“A Norwegian Ridgeback,” he said proudly.

"But your house is wooden," Padma pointed out shakily. She seemed really frightened as she stared at the egg like it was about to attack her, "When it hatches, it'll burn the house down. Dragons are dangerous!"

"Them's seriously misunderstood creatures," he said, shrugging the warning off.

"Thanks for the tea, but I, I'd really like to go now." Padma looked like she wanted to run away and really Harry didn't blame her. He'd learned a bit about them in his old school and knew he didn't want to mess with one.

"It's getting late anyway," said Harry politely.

"I'm sorry if I scared ya, but really dragons aren't that dangerous."

"We'll, we'll take your word for it," said Padma shakily.

"We promise not to tell anyone about your dragon," said Hermione, "but you really should try to find some other place for it. I've read that there are reserves in Romania."

"I'm surprised you never tried to work at a dragon reserve," said Harry.

"Charlie Weasley, one of the Weasley brothers who graduated last year, got 'im a job workin' with dragons right out a Hogwarts. He said the same thing ter me. But I jus' couldn' leave, not wit' the trust Dumbledore's put in me."

"You've kept the job for fifty years, Hagrid," said Padma as she got closer to the door, "and he's never given you a promotion, has he?"

Hagrid's eyes bulged out. "Er, not since me predecessor retired forty-eight years ago. I ain't gotten a raise either. I live here and get free meals, an' can afford ta' have a pint at the Hog's Head now and then, but I ain't never bin able ta save any money. I wonder why?"

"Maybe it was a simple oversight," suggested Hermione. "Anyway, we've got to go. Thanks for the tea."

“Goodbye,” said the half-giant as he sat down wondering for the first time whether Dumbledore was a ‘great man’ or not – if he was just being used as cheap labor.

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The trio figured that each of the teachers that were protecting the stone had set up some barrier like Fluffy that a thief would have to get past. They decided not to ask Professor McGonagall about her protection. They wondered about what Hagrid would do about his dragon, but definitely didn't want to get involved in that. Padma pointed out that if it so much as bit them, they'd be in serious trouble. She had a cousin that had died at a dragon reserve when one got out of control.

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“Aunt Minnie,” said Harry a few days later, “have you heard anything from our lawyers? They're supposed to be conducting interviews this week.” He was in her office where she had been working all morning until he came and knocked on her door, saying he wanted to talk to her. He was facing the door while she was facing him.

She smiled, something few students ever saw her do, but her nephew was an exception. “Yes. As a matter of fact, I received an owl this morning that said they've gotten over fifty current students to join the class-action lawsuit. All Non-Slytherins. They won't interview Snape's students until after the semester is over. Neither can believe how cruel that man is! Most parents they've spoken to have sent letters, and even howlers, to Dumbledore at one time or another but have never gotten replies.”

“That's good news,” he said as he noticed the door glow orange. “Isn't it about lunch time?”

“I believe you're right,” she said, looking at her watch. “We can walk together.”

They got up, and Harry opened the door for her.

“SURPRISE!!!” shouted several students, startling the head of Gryffindor.

“Happy birthday, Aun...Professor McGonagall.”

She looked around to see some Gryffindors, like the four Weasley boys (Percy was even there – always kissing up). Parvati Patil was there, along with Padma, Penny, and Hermione from Ravenclaw. Hannah Abbot from Hufflepuff was there as well. There were several others there too. Harry was surprised at the turnout. It seemed that every non-Slytherin that had stayed for the break was there, as well as a few older Slytherins who apparently had grown to like and respect his aunt. She was as happy as he’d ever seen her, and he suspected that she wanted to cry.

“Happy birthday, Professor,” was yelled by several students at once as she looked around. Her classroom had been rearranged for the party. The desks were no longer there. Instead there was a long table in the middle with chairs. It was similar to a house table from the Great Hall. Harry had gotten the elves to bring lunch to that room. It was already on the table, along with place settings. A cake with an unlit solitary candle was in the middle of it, and a smaller table filled with wrapped packages was in a corner of the room.

“Thank you very much,” she said earnestly as she walked up to the table and sat down, with Harry and Hermione on either side. They all sat down and ate lunch, and then Harry lit the candle on the cake with his wand. “I haven’t had a birthday party in years.”

“How old are you,” asked Ron, only to get smacked in the arm by Parvati.

“It’s impolite to ask a lady’s age,” she said.

Harry had pulled out his mirror and made a quick call. “Professor McGonagall,” he said, “there are a few other people who want to talk to you.”

He handed her the mirror and she saw Mark, Cindy, and Brianna McGonagall grinning at her. “Happy Birthday, Aunt Minnie!” they all said together.

“Thank you,” she said, “It’s great to see you all. You knew about this?” She handed the mirror to Harry, who turned it so they could watch Minerva easily blow out the candle after everyone sang to her.

After the cake had been served, she went to her presents. Some of the kids had given her things like sugar quills or other candies. Others (including Hermione) gave her a book. Percy gave her a fancy quill, ink, and parchment set. Fred and George gave her an apple. But when she touched the apple, it turned into a chocolate worm (like the frogs) that tried to crawl away. Harry gave her a wand holster like his.

“That way you can draw your wand at a moment’s notice. I do recommend you practice catching with it.”

“Thank you, Harry,” she said with a grin.

“You’re welcome.”

She’d already gotten her presents from the three people who were watching her open the presents from Harry’s mirror so they weren’t on the table. The party went on for a little while longer with different students wishing her a happy birthday and thanking her for help she’d given them in the past. Just before people started to leave, a bunch of lit sparklers started floating around the room. McGonagall looked straight at the Weasley twins with her stern teacher look.

“Should I ever find out who was responsible for those fireworks, I shall have to give the perpetrators detention. However, they are rather lovely.”

After everybody but the trio had left, Minerva thanked them, especially Harry, who received a hug that embarrassed him in front of his friends. His aunt said, “You should be thankful I waited for most of the students to leave,” and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 8 – Elves and Dragons

The rest of Easter break went by quickly, and soon it was Monday morning. Everyone was at breakfast preparing for their classes to resume. Hermione was sitting next to Harry at the Ravenclaw table when an owl flew that morning's edition of the Daily Prophet to her.

"Anything interesting in the news?" asked Harry.

"Give me a minute," replied Hermione as she flipped through it, scanning the article titles. "Oh, Mrs. Brocklehurst wrote one of her C.A.R.E. articles!" She then started smiling brightly as her eyes scanned the article. "Here, Harry! You'll want to take a look at this!"

He took the paper from her.

"House Elf Abuse Deterrent Law Passes Wizengamot!"

By Wendy Brocklehurst

Following an article in January about the Hogwarts student organization known as C.A.R.E. (Community Advancing the Rights of Elves), the movement to prevent the overt abuse of house elves has grown by leaps and bounds. This brought attention to this often-overlooked issue, and has had several positive results. One is community awareness. Another is that several Hogwarts graduates joined the group, making it no longer just a Hogwarts club. Another direct result has just passed the Wizengamot.

Moved by photos of an elf being beaten by his master in the middle of Diagon Alley, and knowing that similar situations occur every day all across magical Europe, the head of Ministry Law Enforcement, Madam Amelia Bones, drafted and presented a bill to make house elf abuse illegal. It is called the House Elf Abuse Deterrent law (H.E.A.D.).

This was a very controversial bill among the members of old wizarding families, and had to be edited in its recommended punishments before being passed. Originally someone found guilty of abusing a house elf would have all of their elves taken away, lost the right to ever own another, and served six months in Azkaban. Some

members of the Wizengamot thought that too harsh of a punishment, so a compromise was reached.

On the first offense, the offender is fined 1,000 Galleons. For the second offense, the victimized elf is confiscated by the Ministry, to be given or sold to another family. On the third offense, all of the offender's elves are confiscated. Finally, on the fourth offense, the abuser loses his/her right to own house elves. This is the most severe penalty that an offender will face.

In the final draft of this bill, house elf abuse is defined as 'Performing any harm to a house elf that is still evident twelve hours later. It also added that performing unforgivable curses, such as the cruciatus, or any dark spells, on an elf will automatically count as the fourth offence.'

Even in its current form, this groundbreaking law barely passed through the Wizengamot. Madam Longbottom, a member of both the Wizengamot and C.A.R.E., who voted for the law, stated, 'Although this law isn't as tough as I would like it to be on the cowardly wizards who beat their elves, it is a step in the right direction.'

Albus Dumbledore, the head of the Wizengamot (not to mention several other prestigious titles), also voted for this law, saying that, 'The strong have been preying on the weak for far too long. It is time that we as a society stood up and said that we will no longer stand for it.'

Only time will tell what the results of this new law will be. For more information on C.A.R.E., including how to join, owl Hermione Granger (Ravenclaw) at Hogwarts."

"That's great news!" said Harry excitedly.

"It's the first law ever passed to protect the rights of elves," agreed Hermione. "I'm sure that in time it will lead to others with more severe penalties."

"That is awesome!" said Padma, who was sitting next to them. She'd just read the article in her own newspaper.

About that time, Draco Malfoy showed up at their table standing behind Hermione. Naturally, he was flanked by his bodyguards, 'Dumb and Dumber.' With his usual sneer, Draco said, "I guess you feel really important with your mudblood name dirtying the paper."

Harry whispered to summon his old wand from its holster while Hermione and Padma got theirs ready to be drawn in a moment. Hermione looked at Harry. "Would you please pass the jam?"

Realizing that his best friend was completely ignoring Malfoy, he replied, "Sure, Hermione." Once he'd given her the jam, he whispered a few incantations with his wand pointed at Draco. Knowing Malfoy wouldn't draw his wand in plain sight, not to mention how slowly he drew his wand anyway, Harry put his wand back in his left holster. Harry then placed both his hands on the table in plain view.

"Don't pretend you didn't hear me, you filthy mudblood!" Crabbe and Goyle sniggered.

Hermione simply spread jam on her toast and looked at her other companion. "Padma, would you please pass the pumpkin juice?"

Grinning, she complied. "Of course, Hermione."

As the bushy-haired Ravenclaw was pouring her juice, Malfoy's face turned red. "You can ignore me all you want, but it doesn't changed the fact that you're a filthy, attention-seeking, bookworm, you mudblood!" His stooges were now laughing loudly.

"This pumpkin juice is rather good today, isn't it, Harry?"

While Draco's face was turning purple, Harry said, "I do believe you're right. We should ask the house elves if they did something special today. They are rather clever."

"Yes. Especially the new one that recently started here. A rather delightful one that was freed from a particularly horrid family. I believe his name is Dobby."

At this point the self-important Slytherin lost his temper. He'd never been so completely ignored before. He shouted, "NO ONE IGNORES

ME, YOU FILTY MUDBLOOD! THAT GOES FOR YOU, TOO! YOU HALF-BLOOD SON OF A SQUIB!"

"Mr. Malfoy!" said Professor McGonagall, who'd started approaching the moment she noticed Malfoy at the Ravenclaw table. "Twenty points from Slytherin for that outburst! Get back to your table where you belong!"

"Yes, Professor!" he hissed as he took a step away. Before that step was completed, he fell to the floor. The whole table started laughing at him. He glared at Harry's laughing face. "You made me fall, McGonagall! I felt a spell on my right shoe!"

"I've had my hands on the table since before Professor McGonagall walked up here."

"That is true, Mr. Malfoy. You mustn't blame other students for your own clumsiness." Minerva looked very upset at Draco.

"Of course you'd take his side! He's your nephew!" shouted Draco just as Snape walked up.

"Professor McGonagall, I believe if the accused student were a member of Slytherin house, you would at least check the wand for the last spell cast. You wouldn't want to behave in a biased manner, would you?" He sneered at her.

She looked at her nephew. "You can check my wand," he said, and then whispered the password to get his newer wand from his right holster. "Here it is." He happily passed it to his aunt, who took it and performed the proper spell.

"Are you satisfied, Professor Snape," she said coldly, when the results showed that his last spell performed had been a spell from a Transfiguration assignment.

"Perhaps one of his friends did it," suggested Snape.

"I suppose next you'll have me check every wand from this table," she said angrily. "Mr. Malfoy accused Mr. McGonagall, and it was proven that his wand did not perform any spell that could have caused him to

trip. The truth of the matter is that he didn't have any business at this table anyway, unless of course he was once more begging Miss Granger to date him."

Everyone who heard that (aside from Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle) laughed. Harry even thought Snape's expression lightened momentarily. They all knew Professor McGonagall was referring to Hermione's explanation of the pictures of the three Slytherins kneeling before her on the Hogwarts Express.

"I was not!" spat Draco as he took another step and fell on his face. "Harry McGonagall!" he accused.

"You may notice, Mr. Malfoy," said Professor McGonagall impatiently, "that I still have his wand in my hands." Without a word, Draco got up and carefully made his way back to the Slytherin table while the Ravenclaws laughed hysterically.

Hermione whispered in Harry's ear, "Did you do that with your other wand?"

He smiled and nodded.

"You did do it!" whispered Padma upon seeing Harry nod. "How?"

"Later!" he whispered.

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"So, let me get this straight. The wand that you got in America wasn't a perfect match, but works fine. That's what you used on Draco's shoes today."

"Right," answered Harry. It was later that day, and the trio was in a quiet corner of Ravenclaw Tower.

"But you decided to keep the extra wand a secret. That way if someone disarmed you, you could surprise them."

"Exactly," affirmed Hermione.

“And only Professor McGonagall and Hermione are the only ones here at Hogwarts that know about it.”

“And I only know because I was at his birthday party when his dad gave him the two wand holsters.”

“And you quickly caught on that he wasn’t telling anybody else about the second wand.”

“Exactly.”

Padma turned to Harry. “Do you think your aunt suspects you?”

Harry’s cheeks turned pink as a smile crossed his face. “I’m sure she does, but she won’t tell for two reasons. One is that she wants me to have that extra protection and wouldn’t ruin that over a small prank of making that idiot’s shoes slippery. The second is that she knows Malfoy deserves it. She only wishes he’d give her excuses to have him in detention more often than she already does.”

The girls giggled. “I guess that makes sense,” said Padma.

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It was a few weeks after that when Harry decided he wanted to find out what Hagrid was doing about the dragon. He’d had a nightmare about a huge dragon getting loose and going after him, so he wanted reassurance that the dragon was still under control.

“I will NOT go to Hagrid’s hut while there’s a dragon there, whether the egg is hatched or not!” Padma made her feelings on the subject very clear when Harry brought up the idea. “I don’t blame you for having a nightmare about it, but I think the solution is to get as far away from dragons as possible!”

“I’ll go with you, Harry,” volunteered Hermione. “I’d like to make sure he’s getting rid of it.”

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Fifteen minutes later found Harry knocking on Hagrid's door with Hermione standing beside him. The windows were still covered with blankets.

"Maybe he's not home. Perhaps we should've owled first," said Hermione.

Before Harry could reply, Hagrid's voice came from inside. "Who is it?"

"It's Harry McGonagall and Hermione Granger," Harry answered.

A moment later the door opened and Fang attacked Harry with his tongue. Once Hagrid's dog had calmed down, he looked around to see Hagrid, two redheads, and a big box. "Hi, Ron," he said, recognizing the smaller redhead. The other one appeared to be about eighteen.

"Hi, Harry, Hermione," said the Gryffindor. "Hagrid mentioned that you knew about Norbert. This is my brother, Charlie, by the way."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," said Hermione politely.

"Good to meet you, too."

Suddenly the box started shaking a bit. "Is, is your dragon in there, Hagrid?" asked Harry.

"Yeah. See, I had Ron, write Charlie about Norbert, that's what 'is name is, an' so we're takin' 'im to Romania. I'm goin' with Charlie, but first we're sneakin' Norbert up ter the Astronomy Tower where some friends of his will meet us. Charlie feels that I might bring attention ter them if I traveled with them, so he came all the way here ter help. We'll be flyin' there tomorrow an' I'll get ter work with dragons." Hagrid smiled dumbly as though he had just fallen in love.

Hermione looked at Hagrid with her brow furrowed. "Er, how are you flying? I know that flying carpets are illegal, and, er, aren't you, er, a bit too big for brooms?"

Hagrid chuckled. "Yer right on both counts. I bin too big ter ride a broom since I was twelve. I'll be ridin' a enchanted motorcycle that can fly, and become invisible."

Harry's eyes went wide. "You have a flying motorcycle! That's incredible! I once dreamed...er, that I owned one." He was going to say he'd dreamed of riding one, but then he remembered that according to Aunt Minnie, Hagrid had carried him on a flying motorcycle to his relatives' house, and so this was probably the very bike.

"My dad enchanted a car to fly," commented Ron. "My mum would have a fit if she knew."

"Really?" said Hermione with a worried expression. "You know, that's illegal."

"Don't worry. Our dad wrote that law, and made sure he had a way around it," said Charlie proudly.

"But..." said Hermione until Harry changed the subject.

"So, how long have you had the motorcycle?"

"Oh, almost eleven years. Ever since...since." The half-giant looked like he wanted to cry. "Ne'er mind. This is a happy day. Can I offer you some tea and rock cakes?"

After a quick signal from Ron, Harry said, "Just tea. I'm full."

"Me, too," said Hermione.

"Yer don' know what yer missin.'"

Not wanting a conversation about the merits of eating rock cakes, Charlie asked, "You never told me much about the guy you won Norbert from. If he's stealing eggs, we have to keep an eye out for him. What did he look like?"

"Er, well, it's hard ter say. Yeh see, he wouldn' take his cloak off." He saw the three kids look stunned and raised his eyebrows. "It's not that

unusual, yeh get a lot o' funny folk in the Hog's Head. I never saw his face, he kept his hood up."

"So, what did you talk about?" asked Hermione.

"Mostly me job here at Hogwarts. He wanted ter make sure I could take care of the dragon...So I told him, after Fluffy, a dragon would be easy..."

Harry and Hermione's eyebrows raised at that news. They exchanged frightened looks for a moment, and then Harry cleared his throat. "Did he – did he seem interested in Fluffy?"

"Well- yeah – how many three-headed dogs d'yeh meet, even around Hogwarts? So I told him, Fluffy's a piece o' cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus' play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight off ter sleep." Hagrid suddenly looked horrified. "I shouldn'ta told yeh that!" he blurted out.

"You shouldn't have told a stranger in a pub that either," blurted Harry.

"Er, I suppose so, but what's the harm? He's not tryin' ter get the...thing Fluffy's guardin' er, yeh don't think." He suddenly looked much more worried.

"I don't know, Hagrid," said Hermione."

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The rest of the visit went by in a blur for Harry. Ron and Charlie questioned Hagrid about Fluffy and what he was guarding, and they said their goodbyes to Hagrid. He did talk about how much he'd miss Hogwarts. As soon as they got back to their common room, Padma questioned them about their visit.

"Norbert's leaving tonight, along with Hagrid," answered Hermione.

"And Voldemort probably knows how to get past Fluffy. That blabbermouth told him."

"What?"

After they explained, Padma agreed that it probably was Voldemort or one of his servants. "So why hasn't he gone after the stone, yet?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Harry with his head down.

"Dumbledore," answered Hermione.

"What?" asked the other two together.

"Honestly," sighed Hermione. "He may not be a good headmaster – I mean who would keep Voldemort bait in a school full of children – but he is a powerful wizard. According to all the books I've read, he's the only one Voldemort ever feared."

"He's obviously paying a lot more attention to the stone than his job," agreed Harry.

"So, you're saying the stone's safe as long as Dumbledore's here," concluded Padma.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 9 – Facing the Two-Face

At breakfast the next morning, the trio noticed that both Hagrid and Charlie Weasley were sitting at the head table, along with a woman they'd never seen before. Professor Dumbledore stood up and made an announcement that shocked most of the students.

"Today, I'm afraid that I must inform you all that Rubeus Hagrid, keeper of keys and grounds here at Hogwarts for nearly fifty years, has decided to leave us."

Harry noticed that Dumbledore was looking straight at him and so he made sure his Occlumency shields were up. Despite the twinkle in his eyes, both Harry and Hermione knew he was displeased, though Harry was glad the headmaster didn't attempt to read his mind.

"Those of you who know Hagrid will probably recall that he has always wanted a pet dragon. Now his dream will come true in a way. He has been offered a position at a dragon reserve in Romania and has accepted. Mr. Charlie Weasley has been working at the same reserve for nearly a year and will be escorting him. They'll be leaving an hour after breakfast, and therefore the first classes of the day have been cancelled to allow you all a chance to say goodbye to our friend." He turned to Hagrid, who appeared on the verge of tears. "We wish you the best of luck. Hogwarts won't quite be the same without you."

The whole school (except for the Slytherins) applauded. When the applause subsided, Albus motioned to the unidentified woman at the table. "This is Madam Grubbly. She will be taking over Hagrid's duties. We were fortunate that she was willing to come on such short notice. Let's give her a warm welcome."

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After breakfast, several students, including Harry, Hermione, Padma, and the Weasleys gathered around Hagrid to wish him well. After he'd greeted them all by name, Hagrid said, "Goodbye, all a ya! Don' go wand'rin' 'round the Forbidden Forest alone. Good luck on yer exams."

A few tears started falling down the half-giant's face into his beard. He turned around and walked out the entrance hall while most of his well-wishers followed. Harry gasped when he saw that the motorcycle was parked just outside the door, with a Nimbus 2000 beside it. Charlie Weasley mounted the broom as Hagrid got on the motorcycle.

Harry was having a bit of a flashback to the day he rode it, but didn't show any outward sign of it. He smiled as both men began rising in the air and waved like everyone else until they disappeared before leaving the grounds so that no muggle would accidentally see them. The kids then turned around and walked back into the school.

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Time passed quickly after that, with the trio double-checking the third-floor corridor for Fluffy every few days, but concentrating mostly on preparing for the end of year exams. They glanced at Dumbledore with relief at every meal, knowing that Voldemort probably wouldn't go after the stone that day. While Harry and Hermione didn't have to spend much time reviewing that material, they did spend quite a bit of time helping their study group.

-

On Mother's Day, Harry and Hermione both decided to call their mothers on their mirrors. Each had arranged for a gift to be sent.

"Happy Mother's Day!"

"Thank you, Harry," Cindy said with a smile. "I love your gift. So does Brianna."

"Don't tell me you're giving her the chocolates, mom," he said, "I got them for you!"

"Alright, Harry. I won't tell you."

"That's better," he said with a smirk. Then he looked at her with a more serious expression on his face. "I miss you." It was the first Mother's Day he could remember that he didn't spend with Cindy McGonagall.

She sniffed. "I miss you, too, honey. The rest of us are going out to dinner later, and your sister volunteered to eat an extra dessert as a tribute to you, to show that you belong there, too."

Harry chuckled. "Tell her to eat an extra vegetable instead."

"Actually, I told her that if she eats an extra vegetable, then she can have the extra dessert."

-

The exams came and went, and both were confident that they'd done well. Harry was convinced he'd fail Potions anyway and therefore kept a sample of his final potion that he gave to Professor Flitwick immediately after class. Hermione did the same thing. They gave it to their head of house instead of Professor McGonagall so that no one could say that Harry's aunt was cheating.

-

They went to lunch after their last exam and received a shock. Professor Dumbledore wasn't there.

"He could simply be busy in his office," said Padma.

"Or checking on the stone," added Hermione.

"He never missed a meal to do that before," said Harry.

"Maybe we should find out where he is," suggested Hermione, "Just to be certain."

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, "We'll ask Aun-Professor McGonagall after lunch."

"I can't believe you're still not used to calling her a professor," said Padma.

"She's been my Aunt Minnie my whole life. She's only been my teacher for a year," he said defensively.

They continued eating until they were finished with their sandwiches, and waited for Minerva to get up from the head table. When she finally did, the trio accosted her as she was leaving the Great Hall.

“Hello, Harry, Hermione, and Padma. What can I do for you?”

“Hi,” said Harry, now suddenly getting nervous. “We, er, wanted to know where Professor Dumbledore is.”

She looked confused. “I was under the impression that you don’t like him very much. Why do you want to know that? Are you three planning some sort of prank?”

“No,” said Hermione immediately. “We just wanted to know that he’s still at the castle, so that we know that he’s guarding the school. We may not like him, but he is a powerful wizard.”

Minnie’s face went a bit pale at the word, ‘guarding.’ “I’m afraid he was called upon by the Ministry of Magic, and for some reason he decided to ride a broomstick all the way to London rather than use the direct floo connection in his office...or make a portkey. He could have even flown to Hogsmeade and apparated from there. He seems to be experiencing his fifth youth. Rumor has it that he used to be a Quidditch player when he was a student.” She sighed. “In any case, we can’t expect him back until tomorrow.”

The three students paled. Harry said, “Can we talk to you alone, now?”

“Certainly. We’ll go to my office.”

They walked quietly down the halls, into the transfiguration classroom, and into her office. Once the door was closed and warded against eavesdroppers, Harry spoke. “We think that Quirrel is going to try to steal the Philosopher’s Stone tonight.”

The Professor’s eyes bulged out as she stared at the trio. “How do you know about the stone?”

All three looked uncomfortable. Hermione finally spoke. “We overheard Snape arguing with Quirrel about it once.”

“When? Where were they discussing it?” At the uncomfortable looks they were giving, Minnie said, “Never mind. I don’t want to know.”

“Thank you, Aunt Minnie.”

“I believe that students should be able to come forward with important information without fear of reprisal. You’d be surprised how many times Madam Pomfrey has to waste a week figuring out a student’s ailment when they could have simply told her what bit them, and she’d have cured them in fifteen minutes. They go through all that suffering simply to avoid punishment.” She smiled slightly. “They don’t realize that they’re actually punishing themselves far worse than the staff or even their parents would.”

“But what about the stone?” asked Padma.

Sighing heavily, Minerva got a determined look in her eyes. “As Deputy Headmistress, it is my duty to defend the school. I shall check on the protections. If Professor Quirrel is going to try getting past them, it’ll be tonight.”

“You can’t go alone, Aunt Minnie.”

“The rest of the staff members will need to patrol the rest of the castle. I can’t ask the prefects or the...”

“We’ll go with you,” said Harry.

“You most certainly will not, young man!” she said sharply, but then gave a half-smile. “But thanks for the offer.”

“We’ll sneak after you anyway,” said Harry, “and you know it!”

“This way you can watch us,” said Padma. Although she had a fear of dragons, she wasn’t afraid of much else.

“We can stay behind you and run off for help if you need it,” said Hermione.

Minerva closed her eyes and stated calmly, “No. I cannot allow you to come with me. Endangering any student is unacceptable, especially

my own nephew.” She was looking at Harry. “I want your word that you won’t leave Ravenclaw Tower tonight. Do I have to hex you to keep you there?” She smirked. “Perhaps Mr. Filch has some manacles I could borrow for the evening.”

“Aunt Minnie!”

“You know I couldn’t do that,” she said. “Your father would never forgive me. Then where would I spend Christmas?”

“Fine, you don’t have to hex us,” said Harry, looking defeated.

She looked at the two girls. “Does that go for you two as well?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” they both said at once.

“Good.”

“Oh, by the way,” said Harry, “Hagrid told a stranger at the Hogg’s Head, not to mention us, that the way to get past Fluffy is by playing him music. It’ll make him go right to sleep. He may also have put that in the Daily Prophet. See you later.”

“How did you know about...” said Minerva as the kids headed for the door. “Thanks for the tip. Good day.”

-

As soon as they left the office, Harry pulled the girls into an empty classroom. “I said she didn’t have to hex us, but I didn’t say I wouldn’t follow her.”

“You’re going to follow her?” asked Hermione, looking surprised.

“I have to. She’s my aunt. What if something happens to her? Someone has to help.

“Then I’m going, too,” declared Padma, folding her arms across her chest.

Taking a deep breath, Hermione said, “Me, too.”

-

They spent the rest of the day outside, trying to convince each other that they weren't nervous. Just before dinner, Harry decided to call his sister.

"Hi, Harry," she said from her mirror. "What's up?"

"I just thought I'd call you and gloat that I finished all my exams before lunch, so I'll be able to relax next week while you're taking your tests."

"Yeah? Well, you'll have to start earlier than me next year." She then smiled. "How's the lawsuit going? I want that creep out of there before I start."

"You have a whole year before you start," said Harry, "but hopefully Snape'll be gone before September. The last I heard is that once that greasy git turns in his final grades, he and Dumbledore'll find out about the lawsuit and the current students will be interviewed, including the Slytherins. I hope I get to see the look on their faces when they realize that their praise of Snape will actually go against him."

"I hope that DumbOldDork doesn't try to cheat to get out of it. Isn't he the head of that WiseldiotGambit or something?"

Chuckling, Harry said, "The Wizengamot. According to our lawyer, he won't be able to participate in it because as headmaster he'd have a conflict of interest. Besides, he'll be on trial as well. He's going to be called upon to testify what a great guy Snape is after we have over fifty witnesses show memories proving what a jerk Snake, I mean Snape, really is. It should demonstrate that he's either going senile or doesn't actually do his job as headmaster – making sure that the school has good teachers. They'll also question him about a lot of other things he's done that weren't for the good of the school."

"So do you think Aunt Minnie will be headmistress?" she asked excitedly.

With a smile he said, "Probably, but unfortunately, that doesn't mean we'll run the school. It does mean that the school will be much better. We won't have the Slytherins cheating their way to the house cup anymore. I heard that they've won it every year since Snape started. Good thing Aunt Minnie hasn't let him cheat this year. Unless things change next week, Ravenclaw's winning. Gryffindor would've been ahead if they'd done well with Quidditch, but their Seeker is terrible."

"And next year Ravenclaw's gonna have a great Seeker."

He smiled. "I hope so."

-

Although Harry's conversation with Brianna was distracting, as soon as he hung up, his nervousness returned. He didn't even notice that his sister actually didn't bring up Hermione for once.

Dinner was very subdued, and Harry decided that he'd rather face Voldemort than wait to face Voldemort. He looked at his two close friends and could easily see how worried they were. He looked at the staff table to see that his aunt appeared distracted as well. Without being obvious, he glanced at Professor Quirrel, who was glancing at his watch every few seconds. Professor McGonagall was the first teacher to rise from the head table after dinner. It was almost a relief to see her leave the table. The fact that Quirrel got up right after her and all but ran out the other way wasn't lost to Harry. He wished they could run after him immediately, but didn't want his aunt to see them following.

-

"Did you see Quirrel rush out of the Great Hall?" asked Padma as soon as the three of them were alone. They'd left the hall right after Quirrel and Minerva.

"Yes, I did," said Hermione with a determined expression on her face. "It means we don't have much time. We've got to get to the third-floor corridor without getting caught."

"But how..." said Padma, before being interrupted.

“Now what would three young Ravenclaws such as yourselves be doing wandering the corridors in the opposite direction of your dormitory after dinner?” said Severus Snape. “One might think that you’re up to something.”

“We have every right to be here,” said Harry coldly. “It’s not after curfew.” He then walked right past him, with the girls following closely.

“You shouldn’t...” said Hermione.

“We have every right to be here and he can’t do anything,” Harry cut her off.

“But now he’s specifically mad at us,” said Padma.

“He’s probably just in a snit because he misses his boyfriend Albus.”

Both girls snorted. “Come on,” said Harry, “We need to hurry up.”

“And make sure Snape’s not following us,” added Hermione.

“Nor anyone else,” came a male voice from a nearby classroom.

“What? Who?” said Padma as two twin redheads emerged in front of them.

“By the way,” said Fred Weasley, “Snape isn’t following you. He’s on his way to the dungeons.”

“Which leads us to the question,” said George.

“Where are you three going?”

“We saw you following Professor McGonagall.”

“Who is following Professor Quirrel and someone called Tom Riddle into the forbidden third floor corridor.”

“Tom Riddle?” asked Harry.

“Yes. Take a look.”

“From the map it appears he’s riding piggyback.”

Harry looked at the Marauder’s Map and saw that the two names were next to each other so that they had to be incredibly close. Harry wondered if Tom Riddle was a Death Eater that had somehow snuck into the castle or a Slytherin like Draco Malfoy that was helping Quirrel.

“I wonder if Tom Riddle could be another name for...never mind,” said Hermione.

“What?” asked Harry and Padma together.

“What if Tom Riddle were Voldemort’s real name?” She looked at them nervously. “I mean, I doubt anybody named their baby ‘Voldemort.’ It’s probably just a title he made up.”

“Hmm,” said Harry. “I don’t know. It’d make sense if Quirrel’s possessed like we think he is. We’ll find out when we get there, I suppose.”

“You-Know-Who’s involved in this?” asked George.

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, “DumbOldDork’s keeping a Philosopher’s Stone at Hogwarts...”

“In the forbidden corridor,” guessed Fred.

“Exactly,” said Hermione. “One of the things it does is provide the elixir of life. If Voldemort gets it, he can come back. We have reason to believe Voldemort is possessing Quirrel.”

“Can I see the map,” asked Padma, fascinated with the idea of a map that shows everyone in the castle. She’d heard of it from her friends but never saw it. She walked up to Harry, who was holding it and looked at their position. She saw Fred Weasley, George Weasley, Padma Patil, Hermione Granger, and...

“No,” Harry said, closing it a moment too late.

She looked up at him with a shocked expression on her face. "Har...Harry Potter? I thought..."

"I was adopted. I didn't even know until about a year ago. Don't tell anyone."

"You're not a seer. You can sense him. Where's your scar?"

"A muggle surgery when I was a baby covered it up. My aunt transfigured my hair color about the same time. Nobody but my family and the four of you know."

"Not even Dumbledore?" asked Padma, still a bit shocked.

"No. He left me on the doorstep of some hideous relatives that Aunt Minnie had watched all day. She already knew that they wanted nothing to do with my parents from Lily Potter. Aunt Minnie took me from there because she didn't think they were good people at all, or that I'd be welcome in their home. Dumbledore didn't even bother to find out. He left me there despite what Aunt Minnie told him about them."

"She kidnapped you," said Padma with a smirk.

"So did Dumbledore. He wasn't my guardian. He didn't have the right to say who would raise me."

"That's an interesting way of looking at it," said Hermione. "I wonder what the Potters' wishes were."

"It doesn't even matter," said Harry. "The McGonagalls are my family. I wouldn't give them up no matter what the Potters' wishes were." He looked back to Padma, "So will you keep my secret?"

"Yes." She then took a deep breath. "I suppose this means I need to learn occlumency."

"Yes, if you don't mind," said Harry. "In the mean time, don't look Dumbledore or Snape in the eyes."

"Or Quirrel and whoever's with him," added Hermione.

“So are we going?” asked Fred.

“I don’t remember inviting you two,” said Harry.

“But if you want to get there undetected.”

“You need the map.”

“And we go with the map.”

“Fine,” said Harry, “We don’t have time to argue. Let’s go.”

-

When they got to the room with Fluffy, the twins commented that both Quirrel and Minerva were off the map. After opening that door, they found that the three-headed dog was asleep with a harp on the floor and saxophone floating in the air. The sax was playing a song Harry didn’t know, but recognized from an old movie. They walked to the trap door and easily opened it. Apparently Aunt Minnie had moved the dog away from the door.

Harry looked down where the trap door led. He couldn’t see anything. “I, er, guess I’ll have to take a leap of faith.” He jumped down and landed with a funny, muffled sort of thump on something soft. It seemed like some sort of a plant to him. He was still trying to figure out what kind it was when Hermione landed nearby.

“This plant seems familiar,” she commented.

“It’s grabbing me!” Harry exclaimed as Padma landed.

“The plant is moving,” said Hermione. “This has got to be...”

As Fred landed nearby, the three first-years exclaimed together, “Devil’s Snare!”

“Really?” asked Fred as his twin landed. By this time the first years were being wrapped up.

“We need to relax,” admonished Hermione, and suddenly she fell through.

“Hermione?” called Harry.

“Just relax,” came her voice from below. At that moment, all four of the students on the plant did just that, causing themselves to fall to the ground.

“Don’t you think,” said Fred.

“That was a bit too easy,” said George.

“To be guarding something from.”

“You-Know-Who?”

“Hmm,” said Harry. “Probably. I’m sure there are harder challenges than that up ahead. This way.” Harry pointed down a stone passageway, which was the only way forward.

After walking down the long corridor, they came into a room where they could hear a soft rustling and clinging sound. It had a very high ceiling, and contained three broomsticks. Above them were several jewel-bright birds, and ahead was a large wooden door.

“Do you think they’ll attack us if we cross the room?” asked Padma.

“We’ll fight them,” said Fred.

“If they do,” said George. Both of the twins took out their wands, and the others did the same.

Harry ran across the room, and surprisingly, nothing attacked him. He found the door locked, and “Alohomora,” didn’t open it.

He tried to stick his wand under the door to summon the hinges, but there wasn’t enough room. “Now what?” he exclaimed,

“Well, we could blast,” said George.

“The door in,” said Fred.

“What about the birds?” asked Hermione. “They can’t just be here for decoration.”

Harry took a closer look at the birds and realized, "They're not birds! They're keys!"

"Which one's the correct one?" asked Padma.

Harry pointed his wand skyward. "Accio correct key!" Nothing happened. "It was worth a shot," said Harry, shrugging his shoulders as Padma and Hermione forced themselves not to smile.

"I guess we'll have to," said Fred.

"Fly after it," said George, looking at the brooms.

"That's got to be it," said Padma, pointing at one with a bended wing.

"I'll catch it," said Harry as he mounted a broom. The twins mounted the other two as the winged keys started moving quickly toward the fliers. It reminded Harry a horror movie where birds were attacking everybody.

Fred and George pointed their wands at the flying keys and some sort of light gray liquid sprayed out of the wands at the keys. Each one slowed down when it got hit until it finally fell to the floor with a thud. They were careful not to hit Harry or the correct key. The result was that there were a lot fewer of them to avoid. Pushing the remaining keys aside, he flew directly at the correct one and grabbed it. As he was headed down toward the door, the twins shot the last of the keys.

"Excellent," said Fred.

"You've done something Gryffindor's Seeker."

"Could never do."

"What?" asked Harry, "Catch something?"

"What did you spray at those keys?" asked Hermione.

"We modified the water spell to spray," said George.

"A type of quick-drying muggle cement," said Fred.

They landed and Harry stuck the key in the door. The twins carried the brooms with them as they walked into the next room. What they saw was a shock.

They were in a large square room with stone walls, floor, and ceiling. There was no door beside the one they were in. When the door behind them closed, the walls seemed to spin around, but the floor was unaffected. When the walls stopped spinning, they couldn't see any door in the room.

In the middle of the room, however, two figures were battling with wands. A green beam of light shot out of Quirrel's wand, aimed at Harry's aunt. She dodged and shot a red spell at her opponent, who produced a shield, laughing, "You'll never have the courage to do what is necessary!"

Not saying a word, she pointed her wand at Quirrel yet again. Only this time, his purple turban started changing shape.

"What is this?" said Quirrel desperately, as he reached for the turban, which had just completed its transfiguration into cactus. "OOoouuuuccchhh!" he shouted as his hand got wounded.

"GET IT OFF!" hissed a voice from the back of the defense teacher's head as the group of students watched from a corner.

"Yes, master!" he cried and grabbed the cactus-cap with both hands as he screamed in agony. Blood began running down his face and arms as he screamed in pain. Just as he got the cactus off his head, his robes caught fire.

He through the cactus toward Minerva (who ducked out of the way) and pulled his robe off, throwing it in the direction of the, "Children." The voice that spoke came from a bleeding face with red eyes that was on the back of Quirrel's head.

"What?" said Minerva as she glanced in their direction.

Another green blast of magic shot toward Professor McGonagall, who saw it just in time to conjure a brick in front of her. The spell hit the brick, which exploded into her face, knocking her unconscious in the

process. As she fell to the floor, Harry looked into Voldemort's eyes and felt his invisible scar hurt at the moment he also felt a Legilimens attack.

His shields held as he concentrated with everything he had. He somehow felt he couldn't turn away. He decided to distract him. "Voldemort, I presume?"

"You dare to speak my name?" he hissed.

"Would you prefer Tom Riddle?"

"Crucio!" As Harry writhed on the floor, Voldemort shouted, "Don't ever use that filthy muggle name!" At that moment, his wand was hit with a blast from Hermione and the curse stopped. He turned his wand on the ceiling above them all and blasted it. Huge stones were falling toward Harry's friends, but all he could think about was stopping this monster before he killed everyone.

He pointed his wand at Voldemort/Quirrel, who fired a cutting hex at his right hand, cutting his hand and causing him to drop his wand before he could hex Voldemort. "Ha! Now watch me kill your friends!"

The other kids had managed to move out of the way while Harry was losing his wand, and were on their feet to Harry's right. Voldemort/Quirrel pointed his wand at Hermione while Harry whispered, "Old Sparks." His original wand came into his left hand. He pointed it at the two-faced monster and whispered, "Accio wand!"

The wand left Quirrel's hand before he could fire a spell at Hermione. "I'll kill you with my bare hands!" The possessed professor ran toward the eleven-year-old boy with his hands reaching out.

Harry pointed both wands at the monster, who didn't stop. "This is your last chance, Quirrdemort! I have your wand. Give up!"

"NEVER!" he shouted as he felt spells hitting him from behind. Quirrel screamed in pain but Voldemort didn't care. Voldemort's spirit had the power to keep his victim moving as long as he was alive, so stupefy and body-bind hexes wouldn't work completely. They'd only slow him down.

By the time Quirrdemort reached Harry, he fell onto him, knocking the wands out of the boy's hands, and touching his skin in the process. "Ahhh!!!! What is this magic?" Quirrel screamed as his hands began burning. "Why can't I touch you, boy?"

At the same time, the pain in Harry's forehead got too great and he instinctively grabbed his forehead with his left hand as he closed his eyes for a moment. He let go of his forehead and punched Quirrel's face, burning half-way through it in the process. He then reached around to the Voldemort-side and started touching that face, which caused it to burn as well. Within about a minute, Quirrdemort's body was ashes, and a specter-like form of Voldemort flew through Harry's body, causing him to fall unconscious as the others watched in horror.

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"That bloody stone should never have been here in the first place!"

Harry, who had just heard his aunt's voice, opened his eyes, seeing a very blurry world. He could feel that he was on a bed and found an end table where he felt his glasses.

"But, Minerva, Hogwarts is the safest..."

"Poppycock! You-Know-Who has been inside this castle all year!"

He saw his aunt lying on the bed next to his, arguing with the headmaster. Her face was bruised, and it only made her look scarier as she glared at the headmaster.

"I believe we can save this conversation for another time, Minerva, as your nephew has just awakened." He then looked at Harry with his grandfatherly smile. "Good morning Mr. McGonagall. I hope you're felling well."

"A bit tired, but I'll be fine, sir."

"I'm sure you'll want to talk to your aunt," said the headmaster as he walked toward the door. "I'll leave you to it."

“Harry,” said Aunt Minnie after casting privacy spells around the room, “I distinctly remember telling you not to follow me, and you not only ignored me, but brought the Weasley twins as well.” Harry opened his mouth. “Hermione already said you hadn’t promised, but that’s just a technicality. The point is that you could have died because you disobeyed. Don’t do it again.”

“Yes, Aunt Minnie.”

“That being said, you did an excellent job.” Harry smiled at her. “The others told me what happened.” She took a deep breath. “The official story of how Quirrel died is that I shot a flaming hex at him while he was attacking you. No one here suspects your true identity, although You-Know-Who probably does. Fortunately, I don’t believe that he’s in contact with anybody else for now. That may change at some point and your identity will become public. I suggest you enjoy the time until then.”

“Yes, Aunt Minnie.”

She frowned. “I understand that that monster put you under the cruciatus curse.” He simply frowned and nodded. “How do you feel now?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Just tired and a bit sore.”

“Then make sure you rest.”

“I’ve got a question, Aunt Minnie, before I go back to sleep.”

“What’s that?”

“That room where we found you. What sort of obstacle was that? We couldn’t see any exit.”

She smiled. “That was one of my more brilliant ideas, if I do say so myself. You may have noticed that the other obstacles were relatively easy.”

“Yes. I thought so, too.”

“That’s because Professor Dumbledore suggested what obstacles they make, and the others did so without question. I, on the other hand, came up with my own defense after he suggested that I transfigure a chess board to guard it. I thought that was ridiculous. Chess is a very common game that many people, even muggles, know how to play. The pieces aren’t that brilliant either. Anyone who made the effort to learn how to play chess properly could beat them. Even if they couldn’t, the previous obstacle provided three brooms with which to fly over the chess board. By the way, that’s how we got back up to the third floor – with those brooms.”

“So what was your obstacle?”

“The doors were transfigured into solitary bricks that looked just like the others. The other bricks were charmed to never transfigure. The only way to get out of the room was to pick the correct brick and perform a spell that I invented on it. Quirrel couldn’t figure it out, so that’s why I caught up with him there.”

He smiled approvingly at his aunt. “Brilliant.”

“Thank you, Harry. Oh, by the way, your wands are in their proper holsters.”

“Thanks.”

“Oh, and I’ve started your friend Padma Patil in occlumency lessons.”

She soon removed the privacy charms, and Poppy examined Harry and insisted that he stay for a few more days. About an hour after he woke, his friends that had accompanied him for the adventure visited him.

He found out that Aunt Minnie had given points to both Ravenclaw and Gryffindor over the events that had transpired, and that Ravenclaw was still in the lead for the House Cup.

Harry was still in the hospital wing when he received his grades. He and Hermione had matching report cards. ‘Outstandings’ in everything but Potions, where they received ‘Acceptables.’

"I hope he didn't hurt himself giving us passing grades," said Harry, who knew that they'd both earned O's in that subject as well.

"But this will ruin my record," she said with a panicked expression.

"It'll be that ba..."

"Harry!"

"That jerk's last mistake as a professor! Don't forget that Flitwick has our final potions as well."

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The lawyers informed Harry by letter on the day of the end of term feast that he'd be needed a week after term ended for an interview about Snape and also on the first week of August for the trial. It was therefore decided that he'd spend the first week of summer with Minerva, and then go back home to America.

A week later, the Grangers would visit them for two weeks, and they'd see all the sights in the Chicago area. Harry's dad was taking two of his four vacation weeks (he didn't get the whole summer off this year) at that time so they could enjoy the time together. Harry was really looking forward to showing (or dragging) Hermione around Six Flags Great America for two days among several other things.

His whole family would come to England for the trial and stay for two weeks (the rest of his dad's vacation) and then his dad would go back home to work while the rest of the family stayed two more weeks until Harry boarded the Hogwarts Express to begin his second year.

Harry was released from the hospital wing just in time to go to the Leaving Feast, where Ravenclaw did win the house cup as predicted. Everyone except the Slytherins seemed to be thrilled about that. After the delightful feast was over, he went back to Ravenclaw Tower looking forward to a good night sleep, only to find a party.

Please review. Thank you to those who have. Sorry I took so long posting this chapter.

Why didn't Dumbledore portkey, floo, or apparate to the Ministry and then come right back five minutes later? Dumbledore said that the owl Hermione sent and he, "must have crossed in midair," indicating that he rode a broom (or possibly a beast such as a hippogriff or thestral) to London and back. It seems that he purposely wanted to be away from the castle as long as possible.

Assuming Grubbly-Plank is a hyphenated married name, I decided she's not married yet, so I used Grubbly as her maiden name.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 10 – Going Home

Harry awoke the next morning, still very tired from the celebration the night before. It had been decades since Ravenclaw won the house cup. He smiled as he got up and showered quickly. He still had to pack. He decided that he wanted to ride the Hogwarts Express with his friends, so Aunt Minnie would meet him at Platform Nine and Three Quarters.

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Hermione was sitting with Padma at the Ravenclaw table, working on a half-finished omelet when she heard someone running toward her and turned, seeing her best friend practically jump onto the table.

“Good morning, Hermione, Padma,” he said as he grabbed a plate and started piling food on it.

“Let me guess, Harry,” the bushy-haired girl commented, “You waited until just now to pack your things.”

“Well, I was in the hospital wing until last night, you know.”

“I know, Harry, but you could’ve last night.”

“Give the guy a break, Hermione,” said Padma.

Hermione sighed. “Fine. You do have all your stuff packed now, don’t you?”

“Yes, Mommy. I also sent Hedwig to McGonagall Manor. I don’t think she’d like to be locked up in her cage all day.” Harry grinned at her.

“Harry, I’m serious.”

She then whispered, “You’ve got your broom where no one will find it, right?”

“Naturally.”

“Good. I wouldn’t want you grounded while my family’s visiting you.”

He chuckled. "They wouldn't do that. Maybe I'd be grounded for the rest of the summer once you leave."

"I suppose."

They continued to eat in silence, mainly because Harry was in a hurry to finish his breakfast before the food disappeared. Before they knew it, it was time to board the Hogwarts Express.

-

The whole study group, which consisted of Harry, Hermione, Padma, Anthony, Neville, Hannah, and Susan, decided to sit together on the train. They found an empty compartment and settled into it.

"Harry," asked Neville, "My Gran wrote that your lawyers want to talk to me about Professor Snape this week."

Harry grinned. "They should've contacted every non-Slytherin this week to set up an appointment." The others nodded with matching grins. "The Slytherins will be contacted next week. Just tell them the truth."

"The truth about what?" asked Penny, who was walking by while doing her prefect duties.

"Snape," said Harry. "Did my lawyers contact your family?"

"Yes. I've told Professor Flitwick that if Snape is sacked I'll want to take Potions, provided I did well enough on my O.W.L."

"I'm sure you did, Penny," said Hermione. "I'll bet it was a lot easier to brew a potion without that creep breathing down your neck."

She gave a pretty smile. "Yeah, it certainly was. I've got to finish my rounds. Oliver's waiting for me so we can sit together. In case I don't see you all again, have a good summer."

"You, too," the group answered.

No sooner had the prefect disappeared did the self-appointed prince of Slytherin make an appearance, flanked by his two idiotic bodyguards.

“Well, if it isn’t McGonagall and his crew of mudbloods and squibs.”

“Well, if it isn’t the Three Stooges,” answered Harry with a grin. A few of his friends, including Hermione, chuckled while the rest didn’t react.

“What’s a stooge?” asked Draco.

“An idiot, such as yourself,” answered Padma cheerfully as Harry discretely whispered, “New sparks.”

“I am NOT an idiot! I’m a Malfoy, from one of the purest...”

“We already know your parents are related, and therefore you have severe mental disorders,” answered Hermione in a professional manner. “Crabbe and Goyle as well. You don’t have to brag about it.”

Draco’s face went red. He glanced at his companions, and for a moment, it looked like he might see her point. He glared back at Hermione. “I don’t have to listen to you, you filthy mudblood! My father...”

“You see,” said Hermione calmly, turning to Harry. “The subject is incapable of thinking for itself because of its questionable parentage, and is therefore repeating the words its father told it.”

“Why you!” exclaimed Draco, clumsily grabbing his wand just in time for Harry to summon it (along with Crabbe’s and Goyle’s wands) out of his hands once it was free of its holster.

“You see,” said Harry, still looking at Hermione and having an intellectual conversation about their ‘lab rat,’ “These inbred animals are incapable of learning. How many times have they been disarmed easily in the last year?” While they were talking, the others were pointing their wands at the three Slytherins.

“At least a dozen,” answered Hermione. “Most mice would’ve learned by the fourth time.”

“Do you think I should just break their little toys?”

“You’d better not! I’ll tell my fath...”

“You know, Hermione. I remember back when I was in kindergarten and first grade. A lot of the muggle kids used to threaten to tell their daddy if you insulted them. I wonder if Draco is really a muggle toddler in disguise.”

Hermione looked like she was thinking about it for a few moments. “It would explain his shoddy spellwork if he’s really a muggle.”

“I AM NOT A FILTHY MUGGLE YOU MUDBLOOD!!!” Draco’s face was now purple.

Harry finally turned and faced Draco. “I didn’t say you were filthy...yet.” He pointed his wand and muttered an incantation. Suddenly the same quick-drying cement the Weasley twins had used the week before was coming out of Harry’s wand and covering Draco’s robes. Hermione and Padma instantly began doing the same thing to Crabbe and Goyle, respectively. “Now you’re filthy.”

“Why you!” shouted Draco angrily, taking a step toward Harry. “I’ll...what?” Draco’s eyes widened as he realized he could no longer move his legs or his arms. His bodyguards soon started yelling as well until a prefect came to see what the commotion was.

“What is going on, here?” said Penny with an amused look on her face.

“They attacked us!” shouted Draco.

“Then why are you in their compartment. If they were after you, you’d be the ones sitting down. You obviously started trouble that you couldn’t finish.”

“Here are their wands, Penny.” Harry handed them to his friend. “If you wouldn’t mind levitating them out of here, we’d appreciate it. I think Fred and George Weasley know the counter-spell to that hex. You’ll have to ask them.”

Hermione looked at him and he shook his head slowly. Penny levitated each of them out the door and closed it.

“Why didn’t you tell her the counter spell?” asked Hermione.

“Isn’t it obvious,” asked Padma. “He’s making them sweat. They’ll be wondering if there is a counter spell.”

-

The ride progressed with no other incidents, and soon they were getting off of the train. Harry looked around for a few moments while he was carrying his trunk (it was magically enlarged and had Hedwig’s empty cage inside it). He grinned from ear to ear as he called out, “Aunt Minnie!” and walked toward her. Padma and Hermione walked with him to say goodbye to the professor.

“Hi, Harry, Hermione, Padma. How was the train ride?”

“It was good. Draco and his goons tried to start trouble as usual, but nothing we couldn’t handle.”

“I hope you didn’t do any...permanent damage, Harry,” she said with a slightly amused-slightly worried face.

“No. Don’t worry,” said Padma. “It was just a lesson in humility.”

“I don’t understand why he still thinks he’s something. This year he’s more than proven himself inferior in intelligence and spellwork to the people who he thinks he’s better than.”

“Prejudice is something that can’t truly be understood by anyone. Those who are prejudiced can’t make a truthful, logical argument as to the cause of their prejudice, so non-prejudiced people can never understand. The only reason people are prejudiced is because they want to be.”

“There you are,” said Marissa Granger as she walked up to her daughter. “It’s good to see you.” She hugged Hermione tightly. “How was the train ride?”

-

Adam and Marissa Granger greeted the others and walked off with their daughter, but not before meeting the Patil parents, along with Parvati. Arrangements were made so that both Hermione and Padma would visit Harry the next day. Parvati was invited as well, but she had plans to spend the day with one of her fellow Gryffindors – a girl named Lavender.

Minerva took Harry by the hand, and they apparated into the McGonagall ancestral home.

“Mistress Minerva and Master Harry!” squeaked Blinky the house elf upon their arrival. “I is wondering when you is arriving. Dinner is being ready in fifteen minutes. I is taking your luggage.” With that said, the elf grabbed Harry’s trunk with one hand and Minerva’s with another and disappeared with a small ‘pop’ before Harry could protest that he could handle it himself. Blinky had seemed determined to make Harry and his parents see how valuable he could be ever since he found out that they weren’t planning on keeping a servant when they inherited the mansion.

Minnie sat down on a nearby sofa and Harry joined her. “So, how did you like your first year at Hogwarts?”

He smiled at his aunt. “I liked getting to see you every day.”

“And I, you,” responded the Deputy Headmistress fondly.

“I also enjoyed being with Hermione and my other friends. The only down sides were Snape and Dumbledore. Snape because he’s such a jerk; and Dumbledore because he allows it. Doesn’t he want students to get a good education in Potions?”

Minerva sighed before frowning. “I’m afraid that the Headmaster is more interested in protecting Snape than educating students. I can’t tell you how many Gryffindors I’ve had in career counseling who had hoped to become healers, aurors, or countless other occupations but changed their minds when I informed them they would need a Potions N.E.W.T. to do it.

“The result has been that in the past decade, there has been a shortage of people entering those fields. The majority of people who have were Slytherins, and I suspect it’s because he tutors them in their common room, although I’ve never been able to prove it. Only a select few non-Slytherins have had the courage to try taking Advanced Potions, and half of them are kicked out for questionable reasons that Professor Dumbledore refuses to investigate. This year, thanks to you, a lot fewer students were dropped from his advanced classes.”

“Thanks to you, as well.”

“You were the catalyst, Harry,” she said, shaking her head. “You were the one who let everybody know what Snape was doing, not me. That’s what got him on probation.”

“But you started this lawsuit,” he argued.

“The point is that none of this would’ve happened without you.” She then changed the subject. “Professor Flitwick informed me that the potions that you and Hermione turned in were checked by a certified potions master and found to be perfect.”

Harry grinned. “Naturally.”

“I’m curious. Did you learn anything new from your classes this year?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “A bit. The few spells I didn’t know were easy to learn since I already know Latin. That certainly helps the incantation to make sense. I’ll admit I didn’t learn anything in Potions class.” He chuckled. “In Transfiguration, I learned you were an Animagus. Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“It never came up.”

“Let me guess. You were waiting for me to say, ‘Hey Aunt Minnie, can you turn into a cat?’ or something like that?”

“It was fun to surprise you with the other children. Anyway, I was wondering how you’d feel about being double-promoted.”

Harry didn't look that surprised. "I, I thought that might be possible, but I don't know how I'd feel about it. What about Hermione? She did as well as me. Will she be offered the opportunity as well?"

"Yes. Professor Flitwick, who makes those decisions as your head of house, informed me that he was considering both of you."

Harry looked pensive for a few moments before answering, "I think both of us will have to discuss it. When do we need to have an answer?"

"You should be getting his owl soon, but you don't have to make up your mind until the end of July – your real birthday. You both will have to discuss it with your parents as well."

"I'll tell Hermione about it tomorrow. Maybe we can discuss it with our families while the Grangers are in America."

"Very well. I believe that Blinky should have dinner ready by..."

At that moment the elf in question appeared in front of them. "Dinner is being ready!"

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The next morning around ten o'clock, Padma flooed into McGonagall Manor while Hermione was dropped off by her parents. The Ravenclaw Patil practiced Occlumency with Professor McGonagall for an hour while Harry and Hermione went into the manor's extensive library.

"I wish that we could find the house elf contract in here."

Harry smiled at his predictable friend. "So do I, but it's not here. Would you mind sitting down for a minute? There's something I need to talk to you about."

She replaced the book she was just pulling off one of the shelves and had a seat on one of the cushioned chairs nearby. Harry sat opposite her. "What did you want to talk about?"

At that moment, Harry and Hermione were interrupted by the tapping of two owl beaks on a window in the library. Harry walked over to the window and opened it. Two Hogwarts owls flew into the library, one to each occupant.

“These must be Professor Flitwick’s letters,” commented Harry as he removed the envelope from his owl and opened it. It contained two pieces of parchment. Harry took the first one and read it and the owl flew off, followed soon by the one that had carried Hermione’s letter.

‘Dear Mr. McGonagall,

Congratulations on your outstanding performance last term. Your grades, as well as Miss Granger’s, were the best we’ve seen at Hogwarts in about fifty years.

Due to your excellent academic achievement, you are being offered the rare opportunity to skip a grade. Should you choose to accept this honor, you will begin next term as a third-year. As such, you will be required to choose additional classes from the included list.

You and your parents will need to fill out the included form to inform us of your decision no later than the 31st of July. Please consider this offer carefully, and have an enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,

Professor Flitwick

Head of Ravenclaw House

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.’

“You knew about this?” asked Hermione when she finished reading her letter.

“Um, well, Aunt Minnie told me last night that Professor Flitwick was going to owl us both today. I was about to tell you.” He took a deep breath. “I want to know how you feel about that.”

“Wow. That’s quite an honor. In the thousand years Hogwarts has existed, only a few dozen students have done that, none within the same decade, let alone the same class according to...”

“...Hogwarts, a History. Yes, I know. The question is if we want to do it or not.”

She folded her hands together as she furrowed her brow in concentration. “Well, on the plus side our names will be in the next edition of that book. That would be interesting – for them to print your name as ‘Harry McGonagall’ and then have to change it whenever your true identity gets out.”

“Harry McGonagall is my legal name...”

“...but you know they’ll change it to the famous ‘Harry Potter’ once they learn the truth – which will happen sooner or later.” She saw him start to glare at her. “Not because of me. I won’t tell anyone.”

“I know, and I suppose you’re right. I just want to delay that time for as long as I can. At least I’d be famous for something I earned.”

“Absolutely. We worked hard for this.”

“We’ll be done with Hogwarts a year earlier if we accept it.”

“Is that good or bad?” asked Hermione.

“That’s a good question. One less year without the pressure of earning a living. One more year of life to work a job instead of devote to learning.”

“If we do accept it, we’ll have to work hard to catch up with the rest of the class. Even working ahead, we’re only about half way through second year’s materials. And we will still miss some little things that we would have learned anyway.”

“I do prefer working ahead to trying to catch up. I probably do know about half of the material of second year, but I don’t know it all. Another question is how our friends will feel about it. Will they be fine

with it? Will they treat us differently? We could pretend it doesn't matter to us, but we'd only be lying to ourselves."

"How will the other third-years feel about us? Will they accept us, envy us, or hate us?"

"Other good questions."

"That will also ruin our chances for Head Girl and Boy. You have to be seventeen to hold that position."

"Really?" asked Harry. He actually hadn't given any thought to being a prefect or head, and wasn't sure if he'd want that or not.

"Yes. We wouldn't even be able to become prefects until we're fifteen, which will be our sixth year. So we'll only be able to serve in that position for two years instead of three."

"That's assuming that we do manage to stay at the head of our classes to get the positions at all."

A look of horror crossed her face. "We may find ourselves average or even struggling students if we advance."

"I doubt that'll happen, Hermione. We may have to do some catch-up work, but I think we'll manage if we decide to skip second year. The question is; what do we want."

"Hi guys," said a smiling Padma as she opened up the door to the library. "I'm done with my Occlumency lesson for the day. Don't tell me you've been studying the whole time."

"No," said Harry, quickly stuffing his letters into his pocket. Hermione followed suit.

Padma raised an eyebrow. "You're not hiding something else from me, are you Mr. Potter?"

"It's just school stuff. Professor Flitwick sent us each a letter congratulating us on our class performance."

“Oh. I’m surprised he didn’t offer to have you skip a grade.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other guiltily, while Padma watched their faces.

“He did, didn’t he? Why didn’t you say so?”

“We, er, haven’t decided what to do yet,” answered Hermione.

“Why wouldn’t you want to skip a grade?”

Harry and Hermione told their friend the concerns they had, and she told them, “I’ll support you in whatever decision you make.”

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The week went by quickly, with Padma and Hermione coming over for a few hours every day. Padma planned to continue studying occlumency while Harry and Minerva were in America, and she would resume her daily occlumency lessons when they returned. Harry made sure that he got all his summer homework done since he didn’t have much else to do once the girls left. He’d already read and understood the material, so it was just a matter of writing a few essays.

The day before Harry’s meeting with the lawyers, he spent the afternoon at the Granger residence, swimming in their pool and playing video games with Hermione. He found out that Hermione’s meeting with the lawyers was the day after he went back to America.

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“If you’re ready, Mr. McGonagall, I think we’ll start the interview.” The two lawyers, Sam Gordon and Matthew Marcus, were at McGonagall Manor beginning their conversation with Harry. They were sitting at the dining table in the kitchen, and a dictation quill was taking word-for-word notes of the conversation. Mr. Marcus was asking the questions. Minerva was also in the room, but had agreed not to speak unless she felt they asked an impertinent question.

“Um, sure.”

"It is our understanding, that prior to attending Hogwarts, you learned the skill of occlumency. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"My aunt was concerned that some of the faculty of the school would try to read my mind using legilimency, and she wanted to protect my privacy."

"Were her fears justified?"

"Yes."

"Describe the first time that someone at Hogwarts tried to read your mind."

Taking a deep breath, Harry described how Snape had tried to read his mind during the first feast, and then the other times both he and Dumbledore attempted legilimency after that. When that line of questioning was over, they questions on other topics.

"How did you get into the room that hosted a dangerous three-headed dog?"

They made sure that Harry clarified that it took a simple unlocking charm normally taught to second-years to get into that room. They also asked Harry to describe Snape's 'teaching' method in his own words. To say the least, Harry's words were unflattering. He was also informed that the potions master who'd checked his and Hermione's final potions would be testifying at the hearing.

-

Before Harry knew it, he was at O'Hare airport with his great aunt, looking for his parents and sister. He realized how similar this was to the situation they'd been in at the beginning of Christmas break. He had his trunk in one hand, and Hedwig's cage in the other. The snowy owl looked very upset after the floo travel.

“There they are,” said Aunt Minnie, breaking him out of his thoughts. He looked where she was pointing and saw his sister running up to him. She was wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, along with a Cubs baseball cap.

“Hi Brianna. Don’t tell me you’re still cheering for the Cubs.”

“Always! They’re a lot better than the White Sox you support.”

“Only in your mind, my very young sister.”

Before that argument could escalate, Harry found himself wrapped in his mother’s arms as she gave him a big hug. “Hi, honey. It’s so good to see you again!”

She kissed his cheek, causing him to make a face. “Mom!”

“It’s good to see you, son!” said Mark McGonagall. “You, too, Aunt Minnie! We should get to the car.”

-

On the trip back to Lansing, they talked about the progress that the lawyers were making and some of their plans for the summer.

“We’re gonna spend at least one day at Frank’s Flying Funhouse next week once Hermione gets here,” said Mark. “Harry, I’m sure you’re itching to get back on your Lightning Bolt.”

Facing straight forward, resisting the urge to exchange a look with his sister, Harry replied, “I sure am! I can’t wait to get back on my broom! It has been a while.” He decided to add, “I hope you didn’t let any of Brianna’s friends on it.”

His mom turned around to face him. “No, we didn’t because we had to respect your property. But I was disappointed that you wouldn’t let them. That was very selfish.”

“But mom, I don’t want the thing broke before I can take it to Hogwarts.” For one second, he could swear he heard his sister start

giggling, but when he shot her a glare, she was looking forward with a neutral expression.

-

When they finally got to the house, Harry got his trunk out of the car. While he was still carrying it toward the door, his dad mentioned, "I got us tickets to go to a Cubs game next week with the Grangers."

"Terrific!" squealed Brianna, who was carrying Hedwig's cage.

"Yeah," agreed Harry as he walked through the door. "It'll be fun to watch the Cubs lose. Who are they playing?"

"They're playing the Cardinals," said Mark.

"And they're not gonna lose!" added Brianna firmly.

"They couldn't win a game if they used magic!" countered Harry.

"Could too!"

"Could not!"

"Could too!"

"They haven't won a World Series in like a hundred years!" said Harry as he stepped on the staircase holding his trunk with his left hand. He was thankful that his trunk was charmed to weigh only ten pounds.

Brianna pulled out her wand with her free hand, pointed it at Harry, and shot a tickling charm at him.

As soon as Harry heard his sister begin the spell, he summoned his wand out of its holster. "Protego!"

Brianna's charm bounced back toward her, but she ducked out of the way just in time. Unfortunately, it hit Minerva, who soon was collapsing on the floor in a fit of giggling. She was so overcome with laughter that she couldn't even get her wand to reverse the spell.

Harry couldn't help laughing when he saw his normally dignified aunt in that position. He could also see that his dad was amused, but fighting his laughter. His mom, on the other hand, was glaring at Brianna. That glare was enough to stop his sister from even smiling. Hedwig was squawking at Brianna for attacking Harry. She pointed her wand at Aunt Minnie. "Finite."

Harry summoned the cage and hurried up the stairs to his room, but not before his mom started to yell at Brianna. He smiled to himself as he realized that this was the perfect opportunity. He quickly got his broom out of his trunk and snuck into his parents' room, switching it with the fake his sister had put there. He hid it deep in one of the compartments of his trunk, intending to dispose of it where he'd be sure that his grown up relatives wouldn't see it. He then began unpacking his clothes until he heard a knock at the door.

He grinned. "Come in, Brianna."

The door opened. "How did you know it was me?"

When she stepped in, he pointed his wand at the door, shutting it. "I figured Mom sent you here to apologize."

She looked at the ground. "Um, yes. I also had to apologize to Aunt Minnie. I kind of lost my temper a little bit."

He chuckled. "I guess so. Don't worry about it. You've been shooting spells at me since you were four."

She stuck her tongue out. "You're never gonna let me forget about that, are you?"

"Never," he said with a grin. "Anyway, you provided the perfect distraction to put my broom back where it belongs."

"Really?" she said excitedly, "You made the switch?" He nodded. She squealed, "We got away with it!"

"Shh. Do you want them to hear?"

-

He was over his jetlag the next morning, and watched some cartoons when he got up. He decided to relax this week since he knew that the next two weeks they would be busy showing the Grangers everything in the Chicago area. He was looking forward to getting Hermione to play Quidditch with his friends.

I'm sorry about the long wait. I'll try to be faster.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 11 – The Grangers Invade America

A week after Harry had arrived back in America found the McGonagall family at O'Hare yet again. This time they were meeting the Granger family. At Hermione's insistence, flooded to America instead of flying in a muggle airplane.

The twelve-year-old girl with bushy brown hair and buck teeth walked in front of her parents looking excitedly around the crowded airport until she finally saw, "Harry!" and ran up to him.

"Hi, Hermione! It's good to see you! Welcome to America!" Smiling ear to ear, Harry waved his right hand in front of him to show the terminal as though giving a grand tour of his country. "What do you think?"

Mr. Granger, who was pushing a cart full of luggage, came up behind his daughter and answered, "It's a beautiful airport, I'm sure, but I think we'd all like to see a bit more of America before we decide what we think. I understand that we should be able to see the Sears Tower on the way."

"Absolutely!" said Mark. That's one landmark that's hard to miss."

"Are you sure we're not imposing on you," asked Mrs. Granger. "We could still check into a motel."

"Nonsense, Marissa," replied Cindy. "We have plenty of room as long as Brianna doubles up with Hermione. It's no problem at all."

"We could always have Harry sleep in a cupboard," said Brianna with a smirk. "That way Hermione could have his room."

"Shut up!" said Harry playfully. "Maybe you should stay with one of your friends for the next two weeks. It would save Hermione from your snoring."

"I don't snore! Anyway, I'm gonna use these two weeks to tell Hermione embarrassing stories about Harry every night." Hermione giggled at that prospect.

"You'd better not," said Harry, "because I have plenty of stories about you that I could tell Bobby."

"Don't you dare..."

"I think it's time we started back home," said Mark, temporarily shutting up his kids.

They made their way to the brand new van that the McGonagalls had rented for the next few weeks. They knew their car couldn't fit eight people (Minerva, Mark, Cindy, Harry, Brianna, Adam, Marissa, and Hermione) in it, so it made sense to get a bigger vehicle. Since Mark or Cindy would be doing all the driving, it was in their names, but the Grangers insisted on paying for it.

-

Minerva had stayed behind in her nephew's five-bedroom house watching television. She disliked riding in Chicago traffic and figured that she'd be doing enough of that when they were actually sight-seeing, not going to and from the same airport she'd been to several times. She was heavily involved with a soap opera when the door opened and a stampede began.

Brianna was carrying several bags from Burger King while everyone else was carrying some of the Grangers' luggage.

"Brianna, sort through the bags of food while the rest of us put these suitcases in the correct rooms," said Mark.

"Yes, Daddy."

-

Hermione had brought two suitcases along with her school trunk. She was going to carry the two suitcases and ask Harry to carry the trunk up the stairs. The Boy-Who-Lived looked at her like she was nuts.

"Are you a witch or not? We're in America, now." He pointed his wand at her trunk. "Wingardium Leviosa."

“Sorry, I’d forgotten,” his friend murmured as she pulled her wand out of her pocket. Five minutes later, they were back in the kitchen.

-

After they’d eaten, Marissa Granger asked something that had been on her mind ever since they agreed to come to America.

“I understand that in America, there’s no age restriction on magic.”

“That’s correct,” said Mark with a grin. “And let me tell you it’s come in handy having two magical kids to do chores.”

“We, that is Adam and I, would like to see some of what Hermione’s been taught at Hogwarts.”

Harry smiled. “We’ve been planning on that. Come into the living room for our magic show.”

He then levitated Adam Granger’s chair a few inches off the ground and moved it out of the kitchen while Hermione did the same with her mother. Both appeared nervous at first, but the ride was smooth and they were set down near the sofa as the McGonagall’s walked into the living room.

“That was interesting,” commented Adam.

“We were taught that spell in charms the week of Halloween,” said Hermione.

“Now we’ll transfigure you into algae.”

“Harry!” said Minerva sternly before looking at the victims. “They haven’t been taught to do anything of that nature, I assure you. Human transfiguration is a N.E.W.T. level subject.”

“I was only joking.”

Harry and Hermione then proceeded to demonstrate several of the spells they’d learned at Hogwarts that year, as well as the incredibly useful summoning charm, and then had Brianna show what she’d

been learning at her magic school that hadn't been part of the demonstration (such as the pencil-sharpening spell). Harry was amused at how amazed the Grangers were at even simple spells like shooting sparks. However, what really astounded Hermione's parents was the 'grand finale,' where Minerva changed into a cat and jumped into Marissa Granger's lap.

"That was wonderful!" exclaimed the adult Grangers together as they clapped their hands, "all of you." The three magical kids bowed as the cat jumped onto the floor and retransformed.

Adam looked happily at his daughter. "No wonder you've gotten such good grades, honey. We couldn't be prouder."

At that moment, both Harry and Hermione noticed Aunt Minnie gesturing between them and their parents. Harry suddenly felt nervous and cleared his throat.

"Hermione, um, and I are at the top of our year, and, um..."

His best friend, seeing Harry's ears turn pink, took over. "Webenaskdskpgrd."

"What was that?" asked Cindy.

Harry took a deep breath. "We've been asked if we want to skip a grade."

The four parents' eyes bulged out for a moment until they smiled at the kids. Brianna looked expressionless. Mark spoke first.

"Well, congratulations. Um, that's quite an honer."

"It is indeed," inserted Minerva, "It is a rare privilege. However, there are downsides to the proposition."

"Like leaving your friends behind," said Marissa, "Although you'd still have each other at least."

Cindy looked slightly concerned. "Have you two decided whether you want to skip a grade or not?"

Both Harry and Hermione looked at the carpet as they shifted their feet nervously. “Er,” said Hermione, “we’ve naturally discussed the situation, as well as other consequences. For example, if we do this, we’ll never be able to become head students.”

“I’m afraid that is correct,” said Minerva. “The Head Boy and Head Girl both have to be seventeen – adults under wizarding law – at the start of their final year, but they would only be sixteen, and therefore ineligible.”

“We’d also be behind in our studies and trying to catch up,” added Harry. “We’re currently used to working ahead.”

“It sounds like you don’t really want to do it,” said Adam Granger.

“Er, well, um...” said Hermione eloquently.

Harry cleared his throat again. “I believe you’re right, sir. Mom, Dad, I hope you’re not disappointed.”

Cindy bent down to hug her son. “Of course not, darling. You know we’ll support your decision.”

“That goes for us, too, Hermione,” declared Marissa.

“I can’t believe you don’t want to skip a year at school!”

“Brianna!” scolded her mother.

“Sis,” said Harry, “would you really want to leave all your friends behind and go to class with kids that spent the last year learning things you’ll have to learn in just a few weeks?”

She frowned. “I don’t know.”

“You wouldn’t have class with Bobby, anymore,” he added.

“Shut up!” she yelled, blushing.

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The next day, they all went to New Salem. Hermione was completely in awe as she looked around. "This isn't anything like Diagon Alley," she declared as she watched a well dressed elf walk out of the Magical McDonalds eating an ice cream cone. She followed him with her eyes to a store called Joggy's Jewelry.

"That was the owner of the magical jewelry store," said Mark before turning to his aunt. "That's where I got your brooch from a few years ago, Aunt Minnie. He's a very likable fellow, but drives a hard bargain."

She looked astonished. "That was made by a house elf?"

"Actually, over here they're just called elves." While they were talking, a goblin walked into the jewelry store.

"What's a goblin doing..."

"I'd imagine he's buying jewelry," said Cindy. "I'm surprised you haven't noticed the diversity here before, Aunt Minnie."

"I admit I've seen them walking freely around this town before, but never realized that some of them owned businesses. I..."

"You thought the elves were running errands for their masters and the goblins were strictly on Gringotts business?"

"Well, yes," Minerva admitted as her ears turned pink.

"I guess it would be a cultural shock," said Cindy.

"I just don't understand how European wizarding society is so prejudiced," said Hermione. "Their muggle society isn't."

"I'm afraid that may be part of the real reason why many influential families are against allowing muggleborn wizards and witches into our society," said Minerva. "Without exception, they all realize that some of our laws are barbaric by muggle standards."

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They walked around to different shops, showing the Grangers such places as Wand Locker, which only had a few customers that day, along with any other interesting shops that were nearby. After having lunch at Magical McDonalds (where Harry found he was good at catching Flying Fries that tried leaving the table and said he was warming up for Quidditch), the group headed for Frank's Flying Funhouse to meet with some of Harry's friends (and one of Brianna's) for a game of Quidditch. Both Harry and Brianna's brooms were shrunk and in Cindy's purse. They excitedly walked into the building.

"Hi, Harry! What's up?" said a voice he would recognize anywhere. Harry turned to see his buddy Luke standing nearby with Melissa and Paul. He grinned broadly as he walked up to greet his friends from Wentworth Witchcraft Elementary School with Hermione walking slightly behind him. He heard a giggling girl calling out his sister's name while he greeted his former classmates.

"Hi, guys! It's good to see you!" He motioned for Hermione to walk up to him. "This is my very good friend from Jolly Old England – Hermione Granger."

"So," said Melissa with an evil grin, "Brianna says you're Harry's girlfriend."

She blushed scarlet and looked at the ground while Harry answered. "I already told you guys we're just great friends. You can't believe everything that little troublemaker says. You should know that by now."

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While they were catching up and getting to know Hermione, Adam was renting a broom for his daughter. Cindy was getting her kids' broom cases to their proper sizes (just touching the appropriate place on the case and saying the words – it doesn't require magic from the person doing it). Brianna was talking to her friend that was there as well.

Once everyone was registered and had a broom, they warmed up for a few minutes until they were able to put together a game. Harry was Seeker. Brianna, Hermione, and Melissa were Chasers. The Beaters

were Luke and Brianna's best friend – a girl named Terri. Paul was the Keeper. They played against another group of friends who happened to be there.

Hermione was the first one to get the Quaffle as the game began and flew quickly toward the hoops until the ball was stolen by a boy on the other team. She got mad and turned around to get the Quaffle back when she saw a Bludger (sent from Terri) ram into the boy's right arm, causing him to drop the ball. She quickly dove for it, catching it, and turned back around.

This time, instead of flying straight for the hoops, she glided to the left and right until the same boy got close to her again. She yelled out, "Brianna!" as she tossed the ball to Harry's little sister, who caught it and accelerated her Silver Bullet. Hermione thought it would be a good idea to get as close to the hoops as possible in case Brianna needed to pass her the Quaffle.

Hermione ended up floating around near the three hoops, never staying close to a particular one as she kept one eye on Brianna. She noticed a Bludger heading straight for Harry's little sister and called out her name. The younger girl turned her head, saw the projectile coming at her, tossed the Quaffle, and got hit in the gut.

Hermione caught the red ball that had been thrown at her and looked at the hoops to see the Keeper was at the left hoop and coming. Without thinking about it, Hermione shot the Quaffle through the right hoop, winning the first point. Grinning ear to ear, she turned to see that Brianna was still on her broom, but appeared a bit winded.

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The game went on, and the other team managed to score a few goals before Brianna and then Melissa both scored within five minutes of each other. It was an action packed game that kept a close score. A half hour into it, Harry got tired of the other Seeker marking him, so he dove toward the magically softened ground fast with his Lightning Bolt, the other Seeker close behind him. As Harry pulled up, he heard a crash that meant the other Seeker hadn't, and went back to searching for the golden Snitch.

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When they'd been playing for about an hour, he finally spotted the glint of gold. The score was one hundred to ninety in favor of the other team. The problem was that the Snitch was closer to his opponent. He decided to scare the other Seeker. He faced the boy and shouted, "I'm tired of you following me around!" and started flying straight at him. The other boy panicked and dove down to escape. Harry altered his course straight into the Snitch and grabbed it out of the air.

He was raising the Snitch into the air in triumph when he heard a voice beneath him shout, "That was no fair! You cheated!"

He grinned at the loser. "All I did was yell. You should have been paying attention to the game instead of me."

-

The next day, the group visited muggle Chicago. They went to the Sears Tower, where Brianna was able to get in cheaper than anyone else because of her age. As they went up the elevator toward the top floor, both Mark McGonagall and Marissa Granger got a bit queasy. Professor McGonagall was amazed that muggles had managed to build such a tall structure.

They walked into the area where you can look down at all of Chicago as well as Lake Michigan from. When looking down from there, cars looked like tiny little toys as they zoomed along the play streets.

"I thought they were supposed to look like ants, not Hotwheels," commented Harry as he gazed downward. "What!"

At that moment, his mom had put her hand on his shoulder and he felt himself move forward a bit as he stiffened. Even though there was no way to accidentally fall off the building, he still felt a knot in his stomach form as he felt himself move.

Hermione's dad chuckled. "I thought based off of yesterday that you are not afraid of heights."

“That’s when I’m on a broom, dad. If I fell from here, I wouldn’t be able to stop myself from...becoming one with the sidewalk.”

Hermione, who felt a bit uneasy herself, said, “That is indeed a valid point,” as she walked a bit away from the edge. We are over a thousand feet in the air. This building is one thousand three hundred fifty-three feet high, and we’re almost at the top. Completed in early 1973, Sears Tower is an attractive and contemporary 110-story trophy office tower consisting of steel columns and beams in a “mega-module” system. The building contains...” Harry had a hard time stopping himself from chuckling as he realized that Hermione must have read every book she could find on Chicago the previous week.

After they left that landmark (not before Hermione made them explore a bookstore inside it), they stopped off at a restaurant and got some Chicago style pizza. After that, they went to the Museum of Science and Industry, which had a special Star Trek exhibit that Brianna wanted to see.

She was a big fan of The Next Generation and told them about the latest season cliffhanger – Some sort of time-travel episode where they’d found Data’s head in a cave or something. It somehow involved Mark Twain. Her description was a bit confusing to Harry. “I can’t believe you made us come here. Now everyone’s gonna think I’m a Star Trek nut like you!”

“It would ruin your reputation as a complete idiot with no taste,” agreed Brianna.

When they were on a replica of the Next Generation Enterprise bridge, Hermione, who was a bit familiar with the series, commented, “Star Trek features muggles using technology to do things we do with magic. For example, where they use a transporter, we apparate. Where they use a replicator, we can conjure things. Where they use a phaser to stun, we use our wands to stupefy.”

“I wonder if we have anything like the holodecks,” said Brianna with a smirk.

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “Possibly, but I’ve never read about it.”

By the time they'd finished there, it was time to head back to the McGonagall house.

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The next morning, Brianna excitedly got everybody up early. It was the day of the much-anticipated baseball game at Wrigley Field. Brianna was a huge Cubs fan and was confident that they would absolutely demolish the evil St. Louis Cardinals. She looked forward to seeing the look in Harry's face as the Cubs took their first step towards what she knew was an inevitable World Series Championship. Harry on the other hand had a completely different ideal of this game.

"Hermione, you must understand, the Cubs are pure evil!" he animatedly shouted. "One of my friends here in the States told me that they were Lord Voldemort's favorite sports team. They were finally cursed by the Wizengamot because Voldemort was using his powers to help them win games. That's why they are so lousy, because of the curse!" Harry proudly stated, acting as if his opposition to the Cubs was a righteous calling that was as important as life itself.

"I don't know if You-Know-Who really had any time to worry about baseball while he was busy fighting a war in England." Hermione explained. "But I will take your word that the Cardinals are the better of the two teams."

Harry quickly cut her off after this stating, "Hermione, the Cubs are evil. We MUST oppose them just like we opposed Professor Quirrell or like we must oppose Snape. Evil MUST BE OPPOSED!!!" Harry proudly shouted.

"Yes, and that's why we must root for anyone but the White Sox!" Brianna shouted out of nowhere.

"Yes, here comes the supporter of the evil ones," Harry warned. "Don't worry their foul schemes will fail...."

"Come on Harry, Hermione and Brianna! If you don't leave now we won't make the opening pitch," Mark calmly stated. Harry held in his

disgust at seeing his family all dressed in the color's of the enemy. Only he and Hermione were not in league with evil today.

"Is Bobby ready?" asked Brianna as they piled into the van.

"Yes, I just called him. We'll pick him up on the way," answered Cindy.

"What?" exclaimed Harry. "We're taking Brianna's boyfriend."

"He is NOT my boyfriend! We're just good friends."

An evil look came on Harry's face. "This should be fun."

"Don't you DARE do anything to Bobby!" shouted Harry's sister angrily.

"Or what?" Harry asked arrogantly. "I can..."

"Or you'll be grounded for the rest of the summer!" interrupted Cindy. "Do I have to confiscate your wands?"

"No, mom," said Harry softly while Brianna stuck out her tongue.

Soon the van was parked in front of a house that Harry had never been to and his dad honked the horn. A ten-year-old boy wearing a Cubs baseball hat ran out the door and into the van, finding that the only available seat was next to Harry. Hermione was on his other side and Brianna was sitting behind Harry with the other adults.

Bobby saw the gleam in Harry's eye and nervously sat next to him. "Hello, Bobby. It's so good to finally meet you. I've heard so much about you."

"Um, Brianna's talked about you, too. Is that Hermione?"

"Yes, that's my friend, Hermione. I'd like to know why you're wearing that emblem of evil on your head."

It took the boy a few seconds to realize what Harry meant. He quickly took the hat off. "Um, it was a gift from Brianna."

"I see," said Harry, fighting the urge to set the hat on fire with his wand. "So, what do you and Brianna *study* together?"

"And what do you *study* with Hermione?" asked Brianna from behind him. She turned to her friend. "Don't answer any questions he asks you. It's *none* of his business. And by the way, everyone in this car besides Harry and Hermione are supporting the Cubs, so you can wear the hat, and our mom will kill Harry if he does anything to you."

Bobby looked between the two siblings, trying to decide which one to fear the most. He came to the only solution he could think of. He put his hat back on, faced forward, and kept his mouth shut while Harry glared at his sister.

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After an hour in the van the group arrived at Wrigley Field. The two families, along with Brianna's guest Bobby, sat right behind the Cubs dugout. As the group reached their seats with all the candy, popcorn and soda they could carry, Harry spotted a lone Cardinal warming up in the outfield. The name on his back said Lightfellow, and Harry was impressed with how he was hitting the ball. It seemed like the ball automatically went straight towards his bat every time. The game soon started and the Cardinal lineup went down one, two, three in the first.

In the bottom of the first Mark Grace, Brianna's favorite Cubbie, came to the plate. On the first pitch he hit a shot deep to left field. Lightfellow, the outfielder that Harry had been so impressed with, went back to catch the ball but there was no way he could catch it. Harry turned his head in disgust at the fact that the Cubs were about to take the lead.

All of a sudden he heard the umpire shout, "OUT!!!!" Harry jumped to his feet shocked. He looked as the replay showed the ball suddenly drop like a boulder straight towards Lightfellow who made a leaping grab at the wall. It looked like Lightfellow moved his right hand and spoke a few words before the ball started dropping. Harry thought to himself, *could that guy be a wizard? It sure looks like he used a summoning charm on the ball, not that I'm going to say anything*

about it. The Cubs are getting what they deserve. Harry sat back with a huge mischievous grin on his face as the Cardinals came up to bat.

Brianna grabbed Harry's arm and said: "That man is a wizard. He used a summoning charm to catch the ball. I'm going to tell Aunt Minnie so that she can do something about it."

"You are just imagining things." Harry replied. Obviously Grace didn't hit the ball as hard as we thought he did. It's not Lightfellow's fault if the Cubbies stink." Harry smugly stated. Brianna gave him a dirty look and turned back to the field.

There were two outs and the PA announcer called the crowd's attention to Jeremy Lightfellow who was making his Major League debut. On the first pitch Lightfellow hit a ball that looked like it was going way outside. Harry noticed that it turned inside after the hitter spoke a few more words and began to move his bat. He made perfect contact and the ball cleared the scoreboard in centerfield. The Cardinals were now ahead one to nothing. Harry jumped up and down. He grabbed an unsuspecting Hermione and gave her a huge hug.

Hermione tried to act like she was just as excited as Harry, while trying to keep from having her ribs crushed by her overly excited friend. Was it just her imagination or did Brianna lose her balance and fall into her. Hermione turned around as Brianna said: "Sorry, I tripped on Harry's big foot." She sat back in her seat with a fiendish smirk on her face.

Harry mockingly walked over to Brianna and sarcastically tried to comfort her. "Don't worry Brianna, I am sure that the Cardinals will show mercy and only beat the Cubs by twenty or thirty runs."

Brianna said nothing and then asked her mother if she could go to the restroom. Harry didn't see her for the next few innings and assumed she was upset from what was going on in the game. St. Louis now lead 10 – 0 after a few more big hits from Lightfellow and more spectacular catches. Finally in the bottom of the ninth the Cubs were down to their final out. Harry was going to get his wish. One more out and the Cubs would get skunked by their hated rivals. Only one batter,

some skinny infielder who probably hadn't hit a homerun since little league, was left.

Brianna was around to see the game, but she had other intentions. She knew that Lightfellow, the St. Louis superhero, **MUST** be a wizard. He had to be using summoning charms. She knew that she had to oppose this evil in the most effective way possible. Unfortunately for her, her mother made her leave her wand at home. Mother always suspected that Brianna might be a little irrational during a Cubs game. Luckily Brianna managed to procure Hermione Granger's wand when she "accidentally" bumped into her in the stands.

It took a while for Brianna to find a location where she could use summoning charms without alerting all of the muggle spectators or getting pelted by incoming baseballs. She scouted out the bleachers and found that she could hide behind the seats. Most of the fans were intoxicated or obsessed with booing the hated Cardinals. None of them were paying any attention to the back row. She would change her location every attempt so that she could throw off Lightfellow and the bleachers provided her with the room she needed to do just that. With the Cubbies down ten to zip in the 9th inning, she knew now was the time. She watched the pitch and waited to hear the sound of the bat making contact. As soon as she heard that sound she whispered, "Accio baseball" and the ball landed in the glove of a very surprised Cubs fan. According to the announcer, the guy just hit his first ever homerun!

Harry laughed off the homerun as a fluke. After all, the guy who just hit the ball was due to hit a homerun eventually. Next up was a pinch hitter for the pitcher. This guy isn't very good either. Harry laughed as the first two pitches resulted in easy strikes. The third and fourth pitches were however very odd. They seemed to leave the pitcher's hand with the proper trajectory but took a sharp left turn and hit the backstop at such a velocity that it knocked some of the ivy off the walls. The next pitch was way over the heads of the hitter and umpire. Harry quickly started to complain to Minerva. "Aunt Minnie, someone is using magic to help the Cubs!"

“Calm down Harry,” said the excited witch, “your team is still up by nine runs. If someone were here to cheat, wouldn’t they have started in the first inning?” As Minerva finished her sentence the next pitch bounced its way to home plate resulting in a walk.

The first pitch to the next batter hit him in the back resulting in another automatic base. Brianna hadn’t wanted to do that. She looked and noticed that Lightfellow was moving his arms and chanting some incantation. She needed to do something. As she summoned the next ball after it had been hit, she realized that Lightfellow had done his own summoning and the ball was now heading straight to his glove.

Brianna cast another summoning charm that took the ball into the stand at the last second and also caused Lightfellow to drop his glove. Brianna saw this as her opportunity and whispered “Accio Wand.” The wand hit the wall and dropped to the ground. It was so small that no one would even notice it unless they knew what to look for. Harry gasped when he saw the tiny piece of wood hit the dirt.

“Are you ok Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I’m ok, that last gulp of pop went down the wrong tube.” Harry hoped that she was fooled as he couldn’t have anyone realize that his favorite player, the warrior of righteousness, the Cub Slayer Jeremy Lightfellow is a wizard. He would no longer be able to defeat the evil plans of the Cubs if he was barred from playing the game. Harry noticed Mark and Minerva looking curiously at what they thought was a piece of wood near centerfield. Harry immediately forced himself to start coughing loudly to distract them. He must keep the truth hidden at all costs.

Brianna summoned the next pitch to left-center field for another homerun to make it 10 to 5 in favor of the Cardinals. She noticed Lightfellow stopping to grab his wand while everyone else was admiring the homerun from Brianna’s favorite Cub, Mark Grace. She quickly ran all the way to left field. The first time contact was made Brianna summoned the ball and ducked behind a chair to keep from getting hit by it.

Jeremy Lightfellow ran as fast as he could as soon as he heard contact. He knew that it would go to left field because he spotted the little girl running that way. She had been at each location that the summoning charms had been cast. She was proving to be quite bright, but she was no match for the Lord of the Lightfellow order of Wizards. Jeremy knew that he had to tap into one of his many creations in order to stop the Cubs from winning this game.

He whispered an incantation and the ball slowed down and started to drop. It would stay in the field. He chanted the summoning charm and then felt a huge collision. After a moment of darkness he opened his eyes to see a very angry teammate. "I said I've got it and I meant it too you stupid rookie!" shouted the veteran outfielder who was sporting a nice shade of red across the whole right side of his face. "After this game rook, we're going to show you what happens to rookies who don't know their place."

Lightfellow knew what that meant. He was going to be ostracized within the clubhouse. Fortunately, he didn't care. The next ball was hit straight towards the veteran. This would be out three. As the ball dropped into his glove Jeremy Lightfellow decided that he could make the veteran face the wrath of his teammates. Jeremy whispered "Stoneganos." The ball hit the outfielder's glove with the force of a large stone falling out of his hand and injuring him in the process.

The veteran was jeered by the Cardinal fans who made the trip and was replaced by another rookie. In the midst of the sweet revenge, it occurred to Jeremy that he had lost track of the little witch. As he came to that realization, a towering blast cleared the center field wall to make the score 10 to 7. The race was on. Lightfellow was running towards right field even before the pitch was thrown.

Brianna started moving right, ducked underneath some chairs and then took off back to the left. The Cub hit a high pop fly to right field. Lightfellow prepared to make the final catch. Brianna threw all caution to the wind and used a summoning charm. The ball just stopped and dropped. The summoning charm interfered with whatever spell Lightfellow had just used. He attempted to make a diving catch and just barely missed.

The same player who hit the first home run to start the rally now came to the plate. The pitcher, unnerved after seeing run after run score, could not seem to locate the strike zone throwing balls on four of five pitches. The Cardinal manager brought in his closer. On the first two pitches fastballs whizzed past the hitter for strikes. On the third pitch, a perfect fastball, the bat made slight contact. Brianna quickly summoned the ball and it bounced through the infield rolling all the way out to left field. One more run scored making the score 10 to 8 with the winning run aboard.

The bizarre actions of the ball clearly sapped the closer's confidence. The next pitch was a fat one and was rocketed deep to center field. Both Brianna and Lightfellow ran towards center field. As they reached the wall both cast summoning charms. Lightfellow had leaped into the air to make the game-saving catch. The ball missed his glove by a few inches just clearing the fence.

"CUBS WIN!" "CUBS WIN!" shouted the PA announcer. Harry hung his head in shame. The impossible had happened. The Cubs had won. Harry glanced at the scoreboard and realized that his beloved White Sox had lost today as well. Surely it was a day of great evil. Harry thought to himself that the soul of Voldemort had to be rejoicing at this very moment. Looking for a friendly face to cheer him up he turned towards Hermione and realized that she was gone.

Hermione had grown bored of seeing the Cardinals batter the Cubs and decided to skip the bottom of the ninth and check out some of the attractions in the ball park. She tried her luck at a pitching game and found herself to have pretty good aim although her velocity left a lot to be desired. She heard a lot of cheering going on in the ballpark and she figured that the fans were being good sports and congratulating the Cardinals. After all, the Cubs were down 10 to nothing and had shown absolutely nothing to make anyone think they could even score one run let alone eleven.

She then decided to get herself an ice cream cone and get back to the group. As she left to meet up with Harry, she spotted Brianna, who seemed very happy. "It's good to see that you aren't depressed about your team losing." Hermione said enthusiastically.

Brianna shouted, "Didn't you see the bottom of the ninth Hermione? The Cubs won, eleven to ten! I have to get back to gloat in Harry's face." With that she ran off brushing past Hermione on the way. It felt like she bumped into Hermione's wand. After a quick check Hermione noticed that the wand was still in her pocket and in good condition.

As she continued back towards her seat she was stopped by an individual in what appeared to be a cheap blue business suit. "Hermione Granger," the man bellowed in a very deep voice. "You have been caught illegally using magic at a muggle sporting event. You will show me to your parents."

Hermione Granger was terrified. Who was this man and what did he want? She led him to her parents and he introduced himself. "I am Waldo Laughman, an agent of the American Ministry of Magic." When he noticed their looks of concern, he added, "No don't worry about the statute of secrecy, I have charms cast that will cause passersby to think we are talking about the ball game. The only ones who will hear this conversation will be those in your party." The Grangers cringed at the sight of this wizard holding Hermione's arm like she was a prisoner.

Minerva spoke up on their behalf: "Why have you taken Ms. Granger into custody! She was only enjoying a Football game!"

"It's baseball." Mark whispered.

Mr. Laughman then replied to Minerva in a stern and emotionless voice. "Young Ms. Granger is not a prisoner, but under American wizarding laws the parents are responsible for the criminal actions of their children, In this case using magic to affect the outcome of a muggle sporting event."

Everyone was shocked as the American wizard showed them the last few spells cast on Hermione's wand. Everyone except for Harry and Brianna. While the agent explained that the Grangers would have to pay a one thousand dollar fine Harry shouted, "It's not fair! Brianna stole Hermione's wand and cast all the spells!"

The agent turned to Harry, "Son, I know you want to protect your girlfriend, but your story doesn't have any proof."

Harry shouted at him, "Why not give Brianna some Veritaserum to find out the truth you big oath!"

"HARRY MCGONAGALL!!!" shouted both his parents and Aunt Minnie in unison.

"You will apologize to this man and your sister at once and you will be grounded for the rest of the week young man!" Mark angrily explained.

Harry replied, "I will apologize to Mr. Laughman, but I WILL NOT apologize to Brianna because she is lying and Hermione is innocent!"

Mr. Laughman tired of the long argument and departed. Apparently, the incident was not important enough to do any obliterating.

Bobby asked Brianna, "Why is everyone so upset that the Cubs won? I thought everyone but Harry was a Cubs fan."

Brianna, realizing that Mr. Laughman's charm must have affected Bobby stated that "We are all upset because Harry can't be a good loser."

Hermione angrily protested. "Leave Harry alone you lying...."

"Stop it, both of you!" interrupted Minerva. "We are leaving, and I must say that I am very disappointed in you Ms. Granger." The adults along with Brianna and Bobby left for the van. A disheveled Hermione Granger stood still trying to keep from crying.

Harry put his right arm around her shoulder and told her. "Don't worry Hermione. I will get enough revenge for the both of us. She will learn to never mess with my best friend!" After that they headed back for what was to be a long ride home.

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Over the next week, the group minus Harry managed to visit several other points of interest, including Navy Pier and Shedd Aquarium. Harry was stuck at home plotting his revenge against Brianna for when they got back to England. Hermione was giving Brianna the cold shoulder, and wasn't getting much sleep in the room they shared.

Fortunately, Harry was allowed to go to his favorite place to visit the last few days before the Grangers' vacation ended.

After spending about five minutes in a traffic jam, Mark drove the van through the gate and paid the parking fee. "That would've taken a lot longer if it were a weekend," he commented as he navigated his way through the huge parking lot and eventually found a space. "Everybody remember where we parked."

"Leave any valuables in the van," added Cindy as the group piled out of the vehicle. Harry, Hermione, and Brianna were instantly bombarded with images of Bugs Bunny and Friends as they followed the adults toward the line at the entrance to Six Flags Great America.

When they got into the park, Cindy said, "I know that Harry and Brianna know their way around here better than I do, but I want us all to stick together."

"Can't some of you go off with Brianna?" complained Harry. "She's too short to go on half the rides I like."

"Am not!"

"You were last year!"

"But I've grown! I think I'm tall enough!"

"You won't be tall enough to get on that new Batman ride!" countered Harry.

"Will too!"

"We'll find out when we get there," said Cindy. "Now stop bickering! I know you're still mad at your sister but this has to stop!" She turned to Hermione. "Harry tends to only go on the really fast, dangerous..."

"They're not dangerous!" interrupted Harry. "They're designed by really smart people and are a lot safer than driving a car. They just make you feel like you're in danger."

“Fine, Harry likes the fast rides, but if you like other, less thrilling rides, there are still plenty of rides you can go on.”

“I think I’d like to do both. Maybe I’ll even get Harry to go on a few slow rides.”

“I think I’ll go with you on the fast rides,” declared Adam Granger.

“I won’t,” said Marissa.

They immediately started exploring the park, soon deciding that they should split up into two groups when Brianna was rejected from riding the Shockwave. Cindy put a stop to Harry’s gloating before it began. Brianna was upset that she was just one inch too short for the best rides, but walked off with the others, determined to enjoy herself anyway. Mark, Brianna, and Minerva McGonagall, along with Marissa Granger consisted of the less adventurous group, riding slower rides (starting with a carousel) and watching shows like that were going on that day.

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Harry’s group (Hermione and Adam Granger, and Cindy McGonagall) entered the main line for Batman the Ride after they’d ridden the Shockwave. They looked at the totaled police car that was displayed near the entrance as they waited.

“Why does there have to be such a long line?” complained Harry.

“Because a lot of people want to try out Great America’s latest attraction,” answered Hermione.

“And it would be a lot longer if this were a Saturday,” added Cindy.

“I know, mom. I just hate waiting.”

“I’m sorry we couldn’t rent the whole park for you,” she answered sarcastically.

“I wonder if I changed the money in my vault to...”

“Don’t even think about it, young man! That money is NOT to be squandered away for one day of fun!”

Harry grinned at his mom. “Who said anything about one day? I might get the place to myself for a week.”

“Harry, you can’t!” said Hermione, causing her best friend to start laughing.

“Do you really think I’d do that, Hermione? I’d be better off to buy one of these rides, or better yet, hire someone to make a magical equivalent.” He said the last part in a whisper.

Hermione looked thoughtful for a moment. “Maybe one day we could make one. Perhaps as a N.E.W.T. level Charms project.”

Harry chuckled. “I’ll bet Flitwick would like that. You should’ve seen those commercials from when Shockwave first came out. This guy was sitting on a regular chair that suddenly started acting like a roller coaster. When the ride was over it looked like he’d aged sixty years. If we did something like that – except for the aging part – that would be awesome!”

They promptly stopped that discussion as the line moved again. They didn’t want to risk muggles overhearing them. At Harry’s insistence, they waited the extra time to be in the front row, “Because we’ve waited this long anyway – we might as well get the best seats!”

They finally sat in the front row. From left to right Cindy, Harry, Hermione, and Adam took their seats and the ride began. Harry kept his eyes wide open and loudly exclaimed his enjoyment while Hermione screamed her head off. When it was finally over, he chuckled at his friend. “Are you alright?”

“I...just need to catch my breath. That was an...exciting ride.”

-

From there they went to the Iron Wolf, where, after another long line, they rode the stand-up roller coaster, banging the sides of their heads against the cushions that were in place to keep their heads secure.

By the time they were done with those three rides, it was eleven o'clock – about time for them to meet with the others for lunch.

They arrived at one of the restaurants and ordered a few pizzas while waiting for the others to show up. They had just sat down when Brianna came up behind Harry.

“Did you get Hermione to hug you during those rides?”

“Shut up, Brianna! Did you enjoy the kiddy rides? Perhaps you rode a swingset? Ouch!” His little sister just punched him in the arm.

“Brianna!” snapped their mom.

“Sorry, mom.”

“That you didn’t break it, maybe,” mumbled Harry as he rubbed his wounded arm.

The adults from her group arrived and they discussed what they’d done so far. They’d watched the Batman stunt show, ridden a train around the park, ridden a few mild rides, and played a few games. Mark had won a fairly large stuffed Tweety Bird and given it to Brianna.

After lunch, the group went to a few rides together, the first one being the American Eagle. Harry and Brianna (in a temporary truce just for the ride) sat together with Hermione and her father behind them. Mark and Cindy were behind the two Grangers. Minerva and Marissa decided to abstain from the ride and held onto Brianna’s new toy. The McGonagalls on the ride started singing in unison as the car started slowly making its way up to the first drop.

“Oh say can you see, by the dawn’s early light...”

Hermione looked at her father. “I think we’re on the wrong ride.”

“What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming...”

The McGonagall quartet finished the national anthem just before the car started speeding downwards, causing several passengers to scream in terror.

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They rode several other things, such as the Demon, the Rolling Thunder, and the Whizzer, until it started getting dark. They left the park for the day and stopped at Gurney Mills for a few hours before going home. The next day they returned to Great America to enjoy the rest of what that amusement park had to offer, and ride their favorite rides once more for the last time this year.

All too soon, the Grangers' vacation was over and it was time for them, along with the McGonagalls, to return to England. Snape's hearing was about to happen, and they all wanted to be there for that.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 12 – Justice – Part One

“Alright. Now that we’re here, I want you to take your things up to your room and stay there until dinner. You’re grounded for the rest of the summer.”

“What?” exclaimed Hermione Granger as she dropped the suitcase she was carrying and turned to face her mother.

“Do you really think that we’d forget to punish you for what happened at that baseball game?”

“But...”

“Honey,” said Adam to his daughter, “Only an idiot would take his daughter all the way to a foreign country just to ground her before she gets to see all the sights. We wanted you to enjoy our holiday.”

“Besides, we didn’t know what kind of mischief you and Harry would get up to,” added Marissa. “I hope he’s not a bad influence on you.”

“What?” Hermione looked shocked.

“Don’t worry. We’re not going to try to separate you two or anything,” said her father, “although you won’t be seeing him until that Professor’s trial.” He sighed. “You broke the law and we’re going to have to pay that fine. You have to be punished.”

“But can’t you just fight it in the court?” asked Hermione. “I read the ticket he gave you. It said we’ll have a trial date in the middle of August.”

“If we don’t pay the fine,” finished Adam.

“So let’s fight it!”

“Spend the money for another floo trip to America?” Marissa asked. “I know it’s a lot cheaper than flying, but what would be the point?”

“The point is that I DIDN’T DO IT!!!! Brianna did!”

“Not that again,” said Adam.

“Daddy! Why won’t you listen to me?” Hermione’s eyes were filling with unshed tears.

“They proved it was your wand.”

“She stole it!”

“Will you stop accusing that girl?” asked Marissa, looking angry.

“Why on earth would I want to influence that American game? And if I did, I would’ve helped Harry’s team, not Brianna’s! And furthermore, I would not have broken the law over a stupid game! Why won’t you believe me? Have I ever done something like this before?”

“Well, no, but we did find out about that troll incident,” said Marissa.

“Can I at least try to convince Brianna to confess? Maybe we can visit the McGonagalls tomorrow?”

“You know we’re not going to let you do that,” said Adam.

“Pppppllllleeeeeaaaassssseeee, Daddy?” she asked with her most innocent, pathetic little girl face. “At least let me try and prove my innocence.”

The two adults looked at their daughter and then at themselves. They both took deep breaths and shrugged their shoulders.

“Fine. We’ll let you call Harry on your mirror to ask him when we can visit and then we’ll hold onto it until school starts.”

“But...”

“We’ll still allow you to use his owl to exchange letters. Think of it as not being able to use the phone.”

-

Harry was lying on his bed wearing jeans and a T-shirt, thinking about the last details of his revenge on Brianna when he felt the mirror in his pocket vibrate. He pulled it out to answer it. A smile crossed his lips when he saw the bushy-haired witch’s face appear on it.

“Hi, Hermione! It’s good to see you. I’m just about done planning that prank on Brianna for right after Snape’s trial. Wanna hear about it?”

The girl couldn’t help but grin for a moment, but then her expression turned serious. “Harry, my parents have grounded me for the summer over the baseball game. I won’t be able to call you anymore for awhile.”

“What? They can’t do that! I...”

“Listen. They’re giving me one more chance to get Brianna to confess. We’d like to come over tomorrow.”

Harry took a moment to think. “I think that should be fine. We don’t have any plans for tomorrow. We were going to the zoo in a few days and planned to take you along.”

“Well, if Brianna confesses, I’m sure my parents will allow me to go. Otherwise...”

“I know.” He sighed. “Maybe I should try talking to that brat again. I can’t believe she didn’t confess when your parents were fined.”

“I’m just glad your American wizarding law doesn’t take muggle baseball as seriously as muggle law would. Otherwise the fee could’ve been much higher.”

“A thousand dollars is no small amount anyway. I can’t believe your parents simply accepted the ticket without an argument.”

“I think they were in shock,” Hermione said with a smirk. “They’re not sure what to believe right now. Anyway, they’re not going to fight it in court unless Brianna confesses.”

“Tell your folks to come here at about ten o’clock tomorrow morning. I’ll make sure my parents know, and have them mirror call your parents if it’s not a good time.”

“I guess I’ll see you then. I’ll be able to wish you a happy birthday on the actual day.”

He smiled at his best friend. "Not out loud you won't."

"Of course not. That'll be at your party in a few weeks. If I can come."

After taking a deep breath, Harry answered, "Hopefully we'll get the little b..."

"Harry!"

"...witch to confess so you can."

"I hope so," she said with a sigh. "I'd better go before my parents decide I've talked to you too long."

"Bye."

"Goodbye, Harry."

-

Brianna sat at her desk playing a game of solitaire. She was bored, but Harry had refused to play anything with her. She wasn't sure whether she would prefer the silent treatment to being yelled at and insulted all the time like Harry was doing. She suspected he was planning a major prank on her. He was truly angry with her, the angriest he'd been since her first bout of accidental magic when she'd stunned him with his own wand. A small smile flashed on her face for a second as she realized that this too involved her 'borrowing' a wand. She frowned again, wondering if her brother or Hermione would ever forgive her.

Not that she blamed them. She'd be ready to kill if someone had done it to her. When she started using magic at that game, it was just to even the odds and help out the Cubs. Suddenly it became a crime. When that Ministry wizard showed up and she saw how scared Hermione was, she almost confessed. Almost. She blinked a few tears away when she realized that the reason she hadn't confessed was fear. Fear that she'd be the one in trouble. She'd put on a brave face and claimed innocence, and had been sticking with her story ever since no matter how bad it made her feel.

She was brought out of her thoughts by someone knocking at her door. She shook her head for a moment and put a smile on her face. "Come in."

The door opened to reveal the last person she expected to see. "Um, hi Harry. Did you change your mind about playing poker?"

His face was expressionless. She knew that's the way Harry looked when he was trying to keep his temper under control. "No. I wanted to talk to you." He walked in the room and closed the door.

"What's this about? If it's about that game, the Cubs..."

"This is not about baseball, Brianna!" he said coldly. "It's about Hermione. She..."

"Your girlfriend? She..."

"Shut up and listen! Her parents have grounded her for the rest of the summer. They're coming here tomorrow to talk to you. You're getting one last chance to tell the truth. If you don't, they're going to have to pay a thousand dollar fine and Hermione will have it on her record that she has broken the statute of secrecy! People can be expelled for that!"

"She won't be expelled," argued the girl.

"No, but it'll be on her permanent record even if Aunt Minnie doesn't tell them. Once they pay the fee it will be a confession. I want you to tell them the truth and then confess it in court."

Brianna exercised control of her expression, fighting her instinct to cry. She couldn't stand the way Harry was talking to her like she was a stranger. She wished he'd start yelling at her instead of being cold like this. "Why should I? This'll all blow over by your birthday party and..."

Harry's face turned red as he lost his temper. "Then I don't want you at my party! I don't want any gift you might buy! You've gone too far this time. This isn't just a simple prank; you really hurt Hermione! You're a liar and a cheat! I don't even want you as my sister

anymore! In fact, YOU'RE NOT MY REAL SISTER ANYWAY, AND I'M THROUGH PRETENDING YOU ARE!" He stormed out of her room, slamming the door behind him. He didn't see her start crying once the door was shut.

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Harry slammed the door to his own room, fuming. He couldn't believe Brianna was that stubborn. He tried to ignore the hurt he was feeling and focus on his anger. He swallowed as he blinked back tears that were threatening to fall from his eyes.

"I am not crying!" he hissed at no one. "It's her fault. She cheated and lied! I don't need her! She's annoying anyway." He also ignored the fact that he was breathing heavily and was blissfully unaware of how pink his face was as he convinced himself that he never liked his sister – NOT HIS SISTER – anyway. He decided he wanted to go flying in the backyard, so he got his Lightning Bolt and opened his door, only to find his mother standing in front of him.

"Harry, I heard you yelling and slamming doors on the other side of the house and now your sister won't open her door!"

"She's not my sister, but I understand you taking *your* daughter's side against me!" he retorted, earning a slap in the face. Cindy looked horrified at herself a moment later.

"Harry, I'm sorry I hit you. I lost my temper. Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," he said softly while rubbing the handprint on his cheek.

"Good. I'm sorry I hit you, but I want you to know that Brianna is your sister – biological or not – and I am your mother and love you just as much as Brianna! I've put up with you constantly belittling her long enough! She loves you and I know you love her no matter how mad you are! I will NOT tolerate you saying otherwise!"

"Fine. She's my sister. Are you happy?"

"Don't take that tone with me, young man. Go apologize to your sister."

“No! I’m not gonna do it!”

“Yes you will!”

Harry sneered at her. “My mother taught me never to lie. If I say I’m sorry, I’ll be lying.”

Cindy almost slapped Harry again before stopping herself. “Fine. Go back in your room then. You’ll go without dinner tonight. And give me that broom so you don’t get any ideas about sneaking out your window.” She took the broom from his hands and walked back downstairs.

-

Dinner that evening was a quiet affair at McGonagall manor. Harry wasn’t allowed to leave his room while Brianna refused to leave hers. Cindy could hear that her daughter was crying and wanted to help, but she’d locked the door. Obviously she could ask Minerva to open it magically, but she knew invading her daughter’s privacy wouldn’t comfort her. The three adults silently ate after Cindy had informed them of the situation.

Both children did show up on time for breakfast, but it was still a silent meal. Harry completely ignored his sister, while Brianna was constantly looking at the floor, not speaking to anyone. Cindy did notice that her daughter would occasionally glance at Harry. Both of the children had obviously gotten very little sleep, based off of the dark circles around their eyes. She also noted that Brianna’s eyes were red and swollen from apparently crying all night.

She and her husband hadn’t slept much either as they discussed their children. They’d reached the conclusion that forcing the children to pretend they forgave each other was pointless, so they had to just wait for them to resolve their differences and hope for the best. Immediately after breakfast, both kids went up to their respective rooms.

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At 9:55, the fireplace came to life as large green flames appeared. Blinky appeared in the room immediately to see who the visitors were. A man, woman, and girl with bushy brown hair emerged.

“Oh, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Grangy! The masters is expecting you. Sit down while Blinky gets them!” With a small pop, the elf disappeared.

While wiping the soot off his suit, Adam said, “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to that method of travel.”

“It does make one rather queasy,” admitted Minerva as she entered the room, soon followed by the rest of her family. “Good morning.”

After they all said hello, during which time Hermione looked into Harry’s eyes expectantly, only for him to slightly shake his head. She also whispered ‘Happy Birthday’ to him, causing a small grin. Adam Granger decided to get down to business. “I suppose we should get to the reason we’re here. Hermione is still insisting that Brianna borrowed her wand and interfered with that game. I won’t pretend my daughter’s perfect, but she’s not in the habit of lying.”

“Neither is mine,” said Mark defensively, obviously tensing up as he looked Adam in the eye.

“I’m sure she isn’t,” said Marissa diplomatically. “We’d like to just talk with Brianna about it here in front of everybody to make sure before we pay the fine. After this we’ll never bring it up again. We’re only doing this because Hermione is being very insistent about this.”

Taking a deep breath, Cindy admitted, “Harry is, too.”

As gently as he could, Hermione’s dad said, “Brianna, would you look me in the eyes and tell me that you’re not the one who made the Cubs win?”

“I, I,” said the young girl, blinking to fight back tears as she stared at her feet.

“Please look me in the eye. I promise I won’t get mad.”

The girl swallowed and her father said, "I think she's scared. Maybe it would be better if..."

"No!" said Brianna, finally looking at them as she began crying. "I did it. That player Lightfellow was using magic against the Cubs, so I decided to help them. I took Hermione's wand and...and I waited until the ninth inning and I...I cheated. I made them win. I'm a cheater!"

Minerva, Mark, and Cindy looked surprised and horrified. Adam and Marissa looked surprised and relieved. Harry and Hermione looked happy and smug. "Why didn't you tell us?" asked Mark. "Why did you let Hermione take the blame?"

Swallowing, the frightened girl admitted between sobs, "I was scared! I was scared so I...I didn't say anything." She turned to face Hermione. "I know you hate me now, but I'm sorry! You've always been nice to me, and I did this to you." She then turned to Harry. "Please forgive me! I'm so sorry! I wanna be your sister again!"

Adam and Marissa looked puzzled at this until Cindy whispered, "He said he didn't want her for his sister anymore." It wasn't precisely the truth, but there was no reason to reveal Harry's true identity over that slip up. The Grangers accepted that and nodded.

Mark was the first to speak to his daughter. "Brianna, you did wrong by taking Hermione's wand. You were also wrong to interfere with that game. You were wrong to let Hermione take the blame for it. You also were wrong to let us punish Harry for standing up for her. I am disappointed in you for waiting this long to come clean, but I'm proud of you for finally admitting the truth, and we both love you very much."

He sighed. "You're going to have to testify what you did in the American court, which means you'll be going back to America with me when I have to leave for work two weeks before Harry starts school. Your mother and I will discuss the rest of your punishment and let you know."

"Y-yes daddy."

He turned to the adult Grangers. "I sincerely apologize for this. I insist that we pay for your extra trip to America and that you stay at our house again."

"We understand exactly what it's like to not want to believe your daughter did wrong," said Adam. He turned to his daughter. "We're sorry for not believing you, honey. Obviously your punishment is over and we want to try to make it up to you. How would you like your own owl?"

"Really?" asked Hermione, beaming at her mother, who nodded in agreement.

Mark looked at Harry and Hermione. "I guess I owe you both a big apology. Hermione, I'm sorry that I took Brianna's word over yours. Harry, I'm sorry for punishing you for standing up for Hermione. I guess I haven't been a very good dad this summer."

"We both haven't been good parents," added Cindy while blinking back tears. "Harry, I can't tell you how sorry I am that I took Brianna's side. I know you felt I was playing favorites, but you've got to understand. It wasn't your word against Brianna's. It was Hermione's word against her. You didn't see who cheated and neither did I. You simply believed Hermione over your sister." She looked at Hermione. "I took my daughter's word over yours and was wrong, and I punished Harry for not siding with Brianna like I thought he should." She looked down and softly said, "I thought he was betraying the family."

"Mrs. McGonagall, you've only known me a year, but you've known Brianna for ten years. She's your daughter and I'm just a friend of Harry's. I understand why you'd believe her over me. I forgive you." She looked over to Brianna. "I can't tell you how betrayed I felt when you didn't tell Mr. Laughman the truth. I don't know that I'll be able to forget about this for a long time, but I...I forgive you and want to be your friend."

"Th-thank you, Hermione," she said, looking at her feet as she continued sobbing. "It's more than I deserve." Brianna then looked up at her brother, who'd remained silent since her confession. "H-Harry?"

Sighing, he looked his sister in the eyes. "I probably will have trouble trusting you for awhile, Brianna." She nodded as he took a deep breath. "I'm glad you finally admitted the truth and apologized." He saw his mom give him a small signal and he got up and walked toward her. "I love you, sis." He hugged Brianna tightly as she sobbed on his shoulder. They stayed that way for about fifteen seconds. While they were separating, Harry whispered, "This doesn't mean you aren't getting pranked," which caused her to giggle.

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The next day found Cindy, Minnie, Harry, and Hermione at the zoo, all eating ice cream cones as they walked around, looking at the different types of animals. Mark was staying at the manor with Brianna, who was grounded. He didn't really like zoos much anyway.

"Mom, do you think that one looks like dad?" Harry was pointing at a large monkey with light-colored fur. He didn't look at the name of that species, but noticed that Hermione was studying them and taking notes on a legal pad she'd brought. He'd asked her if she expected a quiz at the end of the day when he'd first noticed it, earning a light slap on the arm.

Cindy looked at the monkey as closely as she could through its cage and seemed to be considering it. With a very serious face, she replied, "Your father has less hair," causing the others to start laughing loudly as a group of three people walked by them.

The largest member of that group was a very bulky man with a moustache that made him look like a walrus. An extremely thin woman was beside him, looking disgusted with everything she saw. They were followed closely by a very overweight boy who looked like a pig in a wig. He had a mean face.

The man looked at his wife, speaking loud enough so he knew he'd be overheard. "Do you see that family, Petunia? Laughing in public like that."

"It's disgraceful. Some people have no dignity. And that boy and girl with them. So homely-looking. Not like our handsome Dudders." She

went to pinch the cheek of her twelve-year-old son, but he moved out of the way.

“Can we go to the reptile house, Dad? I’d like to look at snakes.”

“Certainly, Dudley my boy. It’s right this way.” They walked off in that direction as Minerva stared at them with a pale expression on her face.

“What’s wrong, Aunt Minnie?” asked Cindy. “Don’t pay any attention to what those people said. There’s nothing wrong with laughing.”

“It’s not that, Cindy. I recognize those people.”

“You do?” asked Harry. “Are they wizards?”

“No. They’re muggles. Muggles whose house I spent an entire day watching. Harry, those are the Dursleys.”

“His biological family?” asked Hermione.

“Yes.”

“Can we follow them to the reptile house?” asked Harry. “I’m curious about them.” He then saw the concerned look on his mother’s face. “They do seem as awful as Aunt Minnie said. I wonder how many truckloads of food they have delivered to their house every day for the guys. It looks like they don’t leave any for Mrs. Dursley.”

“If you’d like,” said Cindy, not commenting on his remark.

By the time they’d caught up with the Dursleys, they found them in a room with several snakes in it. Dudley was staring at a rather large one looking bored and had asked his dad to, “Make it move.” After the large man had tapped the glass, getting no response, the boy declared, “This is boring,” and they shuffled away to look at a different snake.

Harry walked up to the one Dudley had been looking at. The sign said it was a Boa Constrictor that had been bred in the zoo. It also mentioned that they come from Brazil. He stared at the snake, which

suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

It winked.

Harry stared for a moment and then winked back. The snake gestured toward Dudley and Vernon Dursley and said, "I get that all the time."

"I'll bet," Harry replied. "It must be really annoying."

As Harry realized how unusual it was to talk to a snake, remembering from '*Hogwarts, A History*' that Parseltongue is a very rare gift that Salazar Slytherin was famous for, he felt himself pushed to the side. He barely managed to stay on his feet.

He looked back to see the boy he knew was his cousin yelling, "Dad, Mum, look at what this snake is doing!" Harry wanted so much to pull out his wand and curse that bully, but figured he'd get in trouble with the Ministry of Magic.

"Move out of the way, boy," came the voice of the walrus behind him. "I want to see this and you shouldn't dawdle. Go rejoin your *family*."

When the man said the word 'family' he sounded like he thought they were disgraces to the human species. Harry looked at them closely for the first time in his life. His biological mother's sister was standing next to her husband and son. The two adults were glaring at him while their son was watching the snake go back to sleep. Harry's party was on the other side of the room watching.

"Actually, you are my family," he said calmly.

The man's complexion turned purple. "What do you mean, boy? We've never seen you before today! If you're trying to get charity..."

"Oh, no. You are Vernon and Petunia Dursley, aren't you?" They nodded while staring at him suspiciously. "My name is Harry Potter. You're my aunt and uncle."

At the mention of the word 'Potter' he saw their eyes bulge out and then a look of fear flash across their faces.

"Then I suppose you're one of those," Petunia looked around for eavesdroppers. "Freaks like them."

"If you mean I'm a wi...mph." At that moment Vernon's hand went over Harry's mouth.

Not two seconds later a woman shouted, "Get your filthy hands off my son, Dursley!" while Harry was kneeing the bulky man in the crotch. Minerva began doing magical crowd control, putting a compulsion on all the muggles to leave that room while Vernon bent forward, holding himself in pain. His face was now tomato red as Harry moved away from him toward his real family.

"Your son?" asked Petunia while Vernon was muttering curse words. "You're not Lily. He said..."

"James and Lily Potter died eleven years ago," said Harry calmly. "She's my adopted mum."

"Good riddance to bad rubbish," said Vernon coldly, finally standing up straight again just in time for Minerva to slap him across the face. She looked angrier than Harry had ever seen her before.

"Lily and James were the kindest, bravest, and most selfless people I ever knew! You're the bad rubbish! I'm so glad Harry wasn't cursed with you as his guardians!"

"Lily's dead?" asked Petunia softly.

"Yes," answered Cindy. "Someone wanted to leave Harry with you, but Aunt Minnie..." She pointed at Minerva. "...didn't think it was a good idea and persuaded my husband and me to adopt him instead – the best decision we ever made!" She smiled at her boy.

"He'd have been straight to the orphanage if they'd tried to saddle us with that freak!" declared Vernon while Petunia stared at her nephew. "He's obviously an ill-mannered hooligan who hasn't been taught any discipline."

"We've taught him self defense!" hissed Cindy at the disgrace of a man.

"You have Lily's eyes," Petunia declared softly while continuing to stare at her nephew.

"Come on, Petunia, Dudley! Let's get away from these freaks! Boy, don't you try coming around our house! You're not welcome there!"

While they were leaving the reptile house, Harry looked at Aunt Minnie. "You were right. They are the worst sort of muggles imaginable. Although Aunt Petunia seemed more civil after she found out her sister was dead." He shrugged his shoulders. "She must've been in shock."

"I'm sorry that those poor excuses for human beings treated you like that, Harry," said Hermione. "It's hard to believe that they could be related to someone as kind and compassionate as you."

"They're not really my family," said Harry, leaving the implied ending unsaid.

"Harry," said Hermione, "Er, were you actually talking to that snake before..."

"Yes. I never knew I was a Parselmouth before, but it just seemed natural. Er, could you keep that a secret? I don't want the other kids freaking out or anything."

"They might even decide you're the Heir of Slytherin or something if they find out," added his best friend. "I promise I won't tell."

"Neither shall I," said Minerva.

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Finally, the day that eleven years' worth of Gryffindors, Ravenclaws, and Hufflepuffs had been waiting for arrived. Severus Snape was being forced to answer for his conduct at Hogwarts.

Harry had gone with his whole family. His parents thought watching a hearing would be educational for Brianna and she was happy just to get out of the house. Not to mention that as a future Hogwarts student, she also had a vested interest in the outcome.

Harry, Hermione, and about two hundred other people ranging in ages from twenty-nine to twelve were sitting on bleachers in a room that was separate from the courtroom. There were five court officials at the front of the room watching them. Looking around, Harry noticed that he recognized several students with them. Penelope Clearwater was sitting next to Oliver Wood. All the members of Harry's study group were there, sitting near their housemates. He counted six Weasleys present, sitting together. He recognized Charlie, Ron, Fred, George, and Percy. The other one was obviously the oldest. He had a fanged earring and a ponytail, and seemed 'cool' to Harry.

He also noticed several Slytherins, including Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, sitting as far away from everyone else as possible. They all had smug looks on their faces, and Harry had a hard time keeping a straight face as he realized that they planned to testify what a great guy Snape was – which was exactly what his lawyers were counting on.

One of the officials, a tall, thin woman with wire-rimmed glasses and dark brown hair, who appeared to be about twenty-eight, began to speak.

"Good morning, everyone. I'm Justice Dorigo. As you know, we're all here today because a complaint has been lodged against Professor Severus Snape. He has been accused of harassment, favoritism, and abuse of power. These are not criminal but civil charges, and if he's found guilty, his punishment will be in the form of losing his job and possibly paying a fine, so you don't have to worry about putting him in Azkaban."

Harry figured that she'd said that so the younger students wouldn't feel guilty about telling the truth. He knew some of the horror stories about Azkaban and would probably have a problem sending anyone there for any charge less than murder.

“My associates will be passing out vials to each of you, and then we will instruct you on how to copy a memory to place inside of it if you’re not familiar with the spell. We will then ask you to deposit any memories that you feel exemplify Professor Snape’s character. Any incidents where you feel he was particularly unprofessional, cruel, unfair, just, friendly, generous, or merciful would be appropriate for you to deposit. They will be shown to the court and you’ll be placed on the stand and questioned about them. While these memories aren’t considered absolute proof, they hold as much weight as any testimony and help tremendously to avoid misunderstanding of testimony.”

After the vials were passed around, Harry immediately began pulling memories out of his head, ignoring the instructors who were educating the others in a procedure he was very familiar with. He started with a few moments of the opening feast. Then his first day of Potions. Before long, he’d raised his hand just after the instructions were completed.

“Yes, Mr?”

“McGonagall, ma’am. Harry McGonagall. I was wondering if I could have a few more vials.” He heard chuckles around him, and saw that the woman herself seemed to have a hard time keeping a straight face. It was then that he realized that based off of her age, it was very likely that she had been one of Snape’s students.

“Certainly, Mr. McGonagall,” she said, glancing at one of the officials. “If anyone else needs more vials, please raise your hand now.” Judging by how many people raised their hands, Harry realized that it would be a long trial.

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Before the trial began, it had been explained that the student witnesses were kept in the same room and would go first, followed by other witnesses who were kept isolated until after giving their testimony so that they wouldn’t be influenced by what others have previously testified. Brianna watched silently while sitting with her parents as the courtroom was called to order.

Since it wasn't a full criminal trial, there were only ten members of the Wizengamot present, most of which were friendly with Harry's C.A.R.E. group. Since Dumbledore was a witness in this case, he couldn't act as Chief Warlock. Instead, Augusta Longbottom did. A few people objected because her grandson was one of the witnesses, but she pointed out the fact that nearly every family in the wizarding world has a member that is a witness in this case.

That was certainly true, as was reflected by all the members of the press that were present. Five were allowed in the room itself, with strict orders to keep their mouths shut and to not use a Quick Quotes Quill. Several other reporters were waiting outside. A few days before, news of this trial had leaked out and the Daily Prophet, along with a few other publications, had put the story on the front page. The spectator area was quite crowded. Hogwarts' entire board of governors was there as well.

When it was time to make opening statements, Matthew Marcus, their British lawyer, spoke first.

"Witches and Wizards, we are gathered here today because of a great injustice that has been thrust upon our children to interfere with their education. A man so vile he has only one friend in the world has been in a position of authority at Hogwarts for eleven years. He has verbally abused scores of students rather than teach the important subject that is Potions. He has shown blatant favoritism to the house of Slytherin, which he is the head of, and has taught by example that cheating is the way to succeed. The only reason for that is because his friend happens to be Headmaster Dumbledore, who has ignored hundreds of complaints against him. We are here to do Headmaster Dumbledore's job – to make Severus Snape accountable for his actions."

There was a mixed response from the audience, but most of them supported Marcus. When he was seated, his opponent, Kevin Killjoy, got up from his seat next to a sneering Snape, and made his speech.

"Upstanding witches and fine wizards of the gloried Wizengamot, a travesty of justice is being attempted in this room. The students are trying to control Hogwarts. The honorable Severus Snape exercises

proper discipline in his classroom, as many of his colleagues fail to do, and is now being put on trial for it.”

“Very well. The prosecution may call its first witness,” said Justice Dorigt, who had entered the courtroom a few minutes before the hearing began. She was conducting this civil hearing. Her job was to make sure proper procedure was followed, while the Wizengamot would determine whether Snape would be fired.

Sam Gordon, the American lawyer who was working with Matthew Marcus, replied. “Our first witness is Harry McGonagall.”

Brianna watched her brother enter the room confidently carrying five vials with some type of silvery substance inside them. She believed they were Pensieve memories, but had never actually seen them. Harry took the stand.

After he was sworn in, Mr. Gordon began questioning him. “Please state your full name, please.”

“Harry Mark McGonagall.”

“How old are you?”

“I’ll be twelve on the twelfth of this month.”

“What type of citizenship do you hold?”

“Duel citizenship – America and Great Britain.”

“I see. Where do you attend school?”

“Hogwarts.”

“Doesn’t one of your relatives teach at that school?”

“Yes. My aunt-actually great aunt Professor Minerva McGonagall is the Deputy Headmistress, Head of Gryffindor, and Transfiguration teacher.”

“What house were you sorted into when you began attending?”

“Ravenclaw.”

“I see. What are those vials in your hands?”

“They’re memories of some of my encounters with Professor Snape. I was told they’d be shown as evidence.”

Sam smiled. He was looking forward to this. “You are correct. Would you please give me the first vial?”

Harry handed it over, and the lawyer walked over to the large projection Pensieve in the center of the room and emptied the vial into it. He pulled out his wand and started the memory, which showed Harry sitting with his friends in the Great Hall. He performed a spell and the projection froze. “Would you please tell us when this incident occurred, Mr. McGonagall?”

“That was my first dinner at Hogwarts, right after I’d been sorted.”

The scene was played out before everyone, showing how Snape had tried to read his mind. Harry then explained that he’d learned Occlumency because his aunt had warned him about Snape’s mind rapes. Next he showed his first Potions class where he was quizzed by Snape. On and on the memories went, taking up about an hour (most were about five minutes long) while Mr. Killjoy looked more and more upset. When it was finally time to cross-examine Harry, the short, stout, balding man looked ready to kill.

“Mr. McGonagall, that is quite a collection of memories you’ve provided.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed them.”

“The only question is if they’re authentic or exaggerated.”

“Objection!” said Matthew Marcus.

Justice Doright said, “Sustained. Please restrict yourself to asking questions instead of making vague accusations.”

Killjoy replied, "Certainly, your honor. I apologize." He then turned to Harry, who was controlling his temper like the lawyers had told him. "Mr. McGonagall, are you claiming that everything we saw happened between yourself and Professor Snape during the past year?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it true that you'd constantly provoked him to the point that he regrettably lost his temper a few times?"

"No. He always started on me from day one. As you saw, he tried to rape my mind at the welcoming feast, and then in our first class he started quizzing me on advanced potions. Then, when I answered him correctly, he docked house points and tried to rape my mind again!"

"When you say, 'rape my mind,' you are dramatizing the mere use of Legilimency on yourself, a likely suspect for rule-breaking."

"I don't know how else to describe rummaging through someone's thoughts and memories without their permission!" A signal from Marcus told Harry he was beginning to lose his temper, so he took a few calming breaths. "My thoughts belong to me and no one has the right to look through them without my express permission. That's why my aunt taught me Legilimency. She knew what Snape has been doing and didn't want me to be yet another victim. Snape is suspicious of anyone not wearing green and silver."

Killjoy now seemed sorry he'd commented on Harry's metaphor but continued his questions. "Oh yes, the accusations of 'blatant favoritism.' Just because you were barely capable of producing an adequate potion for the class you've come up with this whole scheme."

Harry asked a question now. "Are you referring to my Potions final that Snape gave an 'acceptable' grade to?"

"Yes," the lawyer said with a sneer. "Obviously you don't have enough skills necessary to excel in his class."

“Actually, my lawyers have proof that I made that potion perfectly but Snape decided to give me a bad grade anyway.” He looked at the lawyers expectantly.

At this point Gordon spoke up. “Your honor, since Mr. Killjoy has brought up this matter, I’d like your permission to introduce evidence we’d planned on presenting later. It directly relates to this line of questioning. Afterwards he can resume his cross examination.”

“Very well,” answered Doright while Killjoy nodded stiffly.

Gordon stood up holding two vials half-full of a potion and two rolls of parchment. “Knowing how unprofessional Professor Snape behaves, both Harry McGonagall and Hermione Granger (also of Ravenclaw) decided to turn in a sample of their final potion to their head of house, Professor Flitwick, who will be testifying later, immediately after their Potions final exam. He had them both checked by a certified Potions master and they were perfect. This is what’s left of the samples and these are the results of the test. Either Professor Snape faked their grades or he is incapable of properly evaluating potions.” He placed the potions on the evidence table and handed the reports to the judge. He sat back down.

Killjoy, with a sour look on his face, turned back toward Harry, who was grinning. “You stole someone else’s potion to turn into Professor Flitwick, didn’t you?” he hissed.

“No sir,” said Harry calmly. “I’ll be glad to provide you with that memory.” Without being asked, he took out his wand and pulled out the memory while Mr. Marcus walked up to him with a vial for him to place it in. Marcus then placed it in the Pensieve from the moment Harry and Hermione bottled their samples for both Flitwick and Snape until they’d turned in both samples.

Killjoy looked very upset with Harry, but seemed to have realized that he wouldn’t win this round. “No further questions.” Harry then was allowed to join his family.

The next witness was Draco Malfoy, who strutted into the courtroom like the pureblood idiot he is.

Matthew Marcus handled this witness. "For the record, please state your full name."

"Draco Lucius Malfoy," he replied cockily.

"When were you born?"

"The fifth of June in 1980." Judging by Draco's tone of voice, that was the greatest day in the history of the world.

"That makes you twelve years old. Where do you attend school?"

"Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

"What house are you in?"

With an arrogant sneer, he answered, "Slytherin House."

"What do you think of Professor Snape?"

"He's my godfather, as well as my favorite teacher. He is very understanding if a student is having problems. He's personally helped me in his class when I asked. He's very fair."

"Did you bring a vial of memories for us to view?"

Pulling it out of his pocket, he grinned. "Of course."

To Harry's amusement, the handful of memories Draco chose all included him being blatantly favored over non-Slytherins. He saw Draco accusing Neville Longbottom of sabotaging his potion when the Gryffindor was nowhere near him. Snape took his word for it without even asking the terrified Neville and gave him detention, taking twenty points from Gryffindor. Harry noticed the angry expression on Mrs. Longbottom's face while she was watching the memory.

In another, a Hufflepuff girl walked up to Snape during a meal and asked for help, only to be rejected and insulted. Draco was right behind her and asked the same question, receiving help. The next scene showed Snape giving private detailed Potions lessons in what

was clearly the Slytherin common room. Harry noticed Lucius Malfoy bury his face in his hands while that scene played out for all to see. It was all he could do not to laugh.

“So Mr. Malfoy, you are testifying that all these situations are true and really happened?”

“Absolutely,” he answered with another arrogant sneer.

“Does Professor Snape regularly give Potions lessons in the Slytherin Common Room?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“He wants to make sure we’ll be able to pass our O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s when the time comes. He says he can’t teach most of the subject in class because the imbeciles from the other houses wouldn’t understand it.”

“I see. I have no further questions.” He turned to Mr. Killjoy. “Your witness.”

“Surely these tutoring sessions are just a review of material Professor Snape has previously covered,” asked the lawyer, winking at Draco.

“No. He never talks about most of...” He paused, looking straight at Mr. Killjoy for about five seconds until a switch seemed to go off in his head. “Of course. Professor Snape teaches everyone from all the houses equally.” Harry looked around the Wizengamot panel, happy to note that every one of them realized Draco was lying, including a red-faced Augusta Longbottom.

Killjoy’s face was just as red as Augusta’s, but for a different reason. “I have no further questions,” he stated quickly before Draco could provide more rope to hang Snape with. Draco proudly strutted over to his parents, oblivious to the fact that Lucius looked ready to *crucio* him.

"You see," said Mr. Gordon while he was supposed to be calling the next witness, "Professor Snape clearly favors his own house." After Justice Doright shot him a quick look, he continued, "I now call Miss Hermione Granger to the stand."

She was led in answered questions, providing several memories. When any of them were determined to be the same one Harry had provided, they were skipped. Mr. Killjoy seemed to have lost some of his zeal after the first two witnesses, and wasn't very hard on Hermione.

The lawyers rotated between Slytherins and non-Slytherins (until they ran out of Slytherin students), getting consistent results. Even the prefect, Percy Weasley admitted that Snape wasn't fair to Gryffindors. Penelope admitted that if Snape stayed at the school she would have to give up her dream of being a healer because she simply '*can't take that git's abuse!*'

When they were finished with the students, they broke off for a half-hour lunch before they heard the same story from all the alumni. The Slytherins liked Snape and no one else did. Some of them testified (and showed memories) of being kicked out of advanced Potions class for such ridiculous reasons as breathing too loudly or sabotaging a Slytherin whose cauldron blew up on the other side of the room. They then brought in several parents who testified to having sent complaints to Dumbledore that never had any results.

A representative of the Wizing Examinations Authority then testified (and brought proof) how O.W.L. Potions scores for anyone besides Slytherins have plummeted since Snape started teaching. He also testified that the number of non-Slytherins who take the Potions N.E.W.T. have dropped eighty percent, but those select few students who take it do well.

After that, teachers were called to the stand, all testifying at a minimum that Snape was an unpleasant man, while many had seen him be rude or unfair to students. Madam Sprout testified that several of her students over the past decade had changed their career goals just to avoid Snape and that she'd informed the headmaster,

achieving no results. Flitwick said the same thing, adding specific situations involving Harry and Hermione, including their Potions final.

Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall then took the stand. After answering the initial questions about her name and position, she began talking about all the complaints she'd received about the greasy git. "Professor Snape is the reason I purchased a Pensieve nearly ten years ago. I'd received so many complaints about that man I knew they had to be true. When I tried telling Headmaster Dumbledore about it, he'd just tell me that he trusts Snape, and nothing would be done. I'd foolishly thought that if Professor Dumbledore could see for himself how Snape acts, he'd change his mind. I was mistaken."

"How many times would you guess you've shown the headmaster a memory of Mr. Snape acting in an unprofessional manner?" asked Mr. Marcus.

"I don't remember off the top of my head, but my logbook and case of memories are on the evidence table. I know that there are well over a thousand separate instances there, and Albus has seen them all."

"Why do you believe Headmaster Dumbledore has ignored all these complaints?"

"Because Professor Snape was helpful in the war against You-Know-Who."

"But what has that got to do with the teaching profession?"

"Professor Dumbledore feels Snape needs protection, and allowing him to stay at Hogwarts is his solution to that problem."

"So it's not about Professor Snape's teaching skills. It's about protecting him."

Minerva sighed before frowning. "I'm afraid that the Headmaster is more interested in protecting Snape than educating students. I can't tell you how many Gryffindors I've had in career counseling who had hoped to become healers, aurors, or countless other occupations but

changed their minds when I informed them they would need a Potions N.E.W.T. to do it.

“The result has been that in the past decade, there has been a shortage of people entering those fields. The majority of people who have were Slytherins, and I suspect it’s because he tutors them in their common room, although I’ve never been able to prove it. Only a select few non-Slytherins have had the courage to try taking Advanced Potions, and half of them are kicked out for questionable reasons that Professor Dumbledore refuses to investigate.”

“It may interest you to learn that Mr. Draco Malfoy and other Slytherin students testified that Professor Snape does indeed conduct Potions lessons in the Slytherin Common Room. Malfoy admitted that it’s material that isn’t covered in the classroom.” Minerva’s face went from pale to pink to red in a matter of seconds. She was obviously furious.

The lawyer continued, “We have also seen memories of some of those incidents where students were ejected from Advanced Potions with no evidence of wrongdoing aside from Professor Snape’s say-so. I know you’ve been fighting to purge the school of this unprofessional man for a long time. Hopefully your goal will be fulfilled today.” Turning to Snape’s defense attorney, Mr. Marcus concluded, “Your witness.”

Upon seeing Minerva’s glare, Mr. Killjoy gulped and loosened his collar. He wished he’d never taken this case. He got up to ask his questions. “Isn’t it considered unprofessional to interfere with and judge another professor’s teaching methods?”

“Teaching methods? TEACHING METHODS!” Minerva’s Scottish blood was beginning to boil. “That miserable excuse for a man only teaches Slytherins, leaving three-fourths of the students to teach themselves!”

“Well, self-reliance is...”

“Self-reliance? Hogwarts is a school that employs teachers to actually teach their subject to the students! My job description did not say that I should make my students figure out Transfiguration on their own

while I laugh at their failures, and I don't think it's supposed to be different in Potions! It wasn't that way when I was a student, anyway!"

"No further questions," said Killjoy, clearly afraid of Aunt Minnie's temper.

Sam Gordon got up from his chair. "At this point, we'd like to call in two witnesses who have been indirectly affected by this situation. Madam Amelia Bones, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement will now take the stand."

A broad, square-jawed witch with very short gray hair, thick eyebrows and a monocle confidently walked to the stand.

"Please state your full name and position for the record, Madam."

"Amelia Susan Bones, head of the DMLE."

"When you heard about this case recently, you came to us, asking to testify. Why?"

"Because Severus Snape has done our country grievous harm."

"What do you mean?"

"As you know, a Potions N.E.W.T. is required in order to enter my department to become an auror or almost any other position. I've brought charts that show a steady decline of applicants since that man took over the position of teaching Potions. We've only had four applicants over the last three years who weren't members of Slytherin house. The bottom line is that we now receive only thirty percent of the number of applicants that we used to receive. Many of our master aurors are nearing retirement age but we don't have enough young aurors to replace them. I estimate that if things keep going the way they are that by 1996 our auror force will be half the size it was ten years ago." That statement brought ten seconds of silence over the whole courtroom.

"Madam Bones, do you have anything else to add?"

“Only that I implore each member of the jury to do what is best for your country and not let the apparent blindness of Albus Dumbledore cripple our auror force.” She’d wanted to add that most of the Slytherin applicants came from families with members that had served Voldemort (under the laughable excuse of the Imperius curse), but knew that it wouldn’t help the case.”

“Your witness.”

Having listened to three heads of houses complain that their students were denied their dreams of becoming an auror, Killjoy knew Bones was right. He further knew that she could intimidate him a lot more than he could intimidate her. By this time, even he wanted Snape fired. When he’d taken the case, he hadn’t realized how bad things were. Dumbledore had told him it was just a misunderstanding between a student who was related to McGonagall and Professor Snape. He wanted to drop the case now, but knew he couldn’t. He simply muttered, “I have no questions for this witness.”

Next they brought in the head of St. Mungo’s, who said basically the same thing Amelia had said, only about Healers.

At this point, Mr. Killjoy called the first of his two witnesses (if you count Snape, who’d insisted against Killjoy’s advice that he be allowed to testify), “Albus Dumbledore,” for all the good it would do.

“Headmaster Dumbledore, would you please tell the court why you hired Professor Snape to the position of Potions teacher and Head of Slytherin House eleven years ago.”

“Because he is a certified Potions master and had been a Slytherin. I stand by my decision.”

“Have the complaints against him made you ever wonder if hiring him was a good decision?”

“No. I trust Severus Snape.”

Killjoy knew that even with these questions, Dumbledore was burying himself and Snape. He further knew that Gordon and Marcus were going to roast him alive and eat him for dinner. Unfortunately, he

didn't know any question he could ask Dumbledore and get a good answer, but he still had to try. "What have you done when you've received complaints about Professor Snape?"

"I've spoken to him about them, and he assured me that they were merely complaining that they'd either earned a bad mark on an assignment or had been caught misbehaving."

At this point Killjoy wanted to strangle DumbOldDork. He really didn't care about the students involved! Killjoy wasn't exactly a nice person, but he expected Hogwarts to be run properly. Yet this idiot didn't seem to take thousands of complaints against the same teacher seriously. He was done protecting Albus from the wolves. He turned to the other side of the courtroom. "Your witness."

The two lawyers had previously flipped a coin over who would handle Dumbledore, and Matthew Marcus had won.

"Professor Dumbledore, you answered the question of why you put Professor Snape in his current position, but you didn't say why you decided to hire him in the first place."

"He became a spy for our side during the war against Voldemort at great personal risk."

"I see. So you hired him as a teacher for help in a war that ended two months after he started teaching."

"Yes. It was a perfect position to spy from."

"Why didn't you let him go after the war ended?"

"He needed protection from the Death Eaters who are still loose, and Hogwarts seemed the safest place for him."

"So what you're saying is that his position has nothing to do with his qualifications or the students' best interests. You are simply helping a man who acts like a Death Eater when he's in the classroom! You don't hold him accountable for his actions and ignore thousands of complaints against him. You further ignore the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T."

results that speak for themselves and say what a poor teacher Professor Snape is!”

“I trust Severus Snape,” Dumbledore calmly replied with a twinkle in his eye, as though that alone should put everyone at ease.

“To do what?”

Taken aback by that question, Albus had to think for a second. “He’s not a Death Eater.”

“Although that’s hard to believe based off his behavior toward everyone in Hogwarts except you, let’s say you’re right. What has that got to do with anything? There are tons of people who aren’t Death Eaters. That doesn’t mean they can or should all teach. Half the prisoners in Azkaban had nothing to do with You-Know-Who, yet they committed crimes. Do you think they should teach at your school?”

“Of course not. Severus Snape is a good teacher.”

“According to who? The only students that like him are from his own house, which he blatantly favors. Your own Deputy Headmistress has been complaining about him for years.” He walked over to the table and picked up a scroll. After showing it to Dumbledore, he asked, “Do you recognize what this is?”

With downcast eyes, the old man answered, “It’s a chart of all the house points Severus has given and taken every year since he started at Hogwarts.”

“Have you noticed any pattern?”

Sighing Albus admitted, “Over the past eleven years, Severus has never taken a single point from Slytherin.” There were gasps all over the room.

“Anything else?”

“He’s never given a point to Gryffindor or Hufflepuff at all, but has given one point to Ravenclaw each year except this one.”

“Anything else?”

“He’s taken approximately a thousand points from Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff and given three thousand points to Slytherin every year.”

“According to Professor McGonagall, you have been shown these lists every year. Is that true?”

“Yes. But that doesn’t prove he’s a Death Eater.”

“That’s not what this trial is about, sir. Your job as headmaster is to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. Part of that is making sure your teachers do that. Instead, you hired someone who you owe a personal favor to and not only made him a teacher but head of house, and then you don’t hold him accountable for his blatant favoritism and abuse of authority despite over a decade of complaints.

“It makes me wonder what other ways you have ignored the students’ best interests. Professor Dumbledore, you are not on trial here, but I would recommend that the Hogwarts board of governors reevaluate the wisdom of keeping you as headmaster. If I’m not mistaken, there were other matters that occurred at Hogwarts this year due to your decision to use the school full of children to store an artifact that you knew had attracted the attention of a powerful dark wizard. The end result was a teacher’s death and students being injured.”

“Objection,” said Killjoy softly, still trying to do his job. “Harassing the witness.”

“Sustained,” said Justice Dorigt half-heartedly. “Stick to asking questions.”

“How long have you known that Professor Snape uses Legilimency on unsuspecting students?”

“Since he started at Hogwarts. It’s a security precaution.”

“You’re saying that trying to rape the mind of an eleven-year-old who just got sorted is a security precaution?”

“Well...”

“How could you possibly have ignored the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. results over the past decade?”

“I asked Professor Snape about it, and he explained that many of the students of this generation are simply not good at Potions and won’t ask him for help.”

“And you trust Severus Snape.”

“Yes.”

“Have you ever thought of spying on him?”

“That would be unethical,” said Dumbledore, showing offence at such an idea.

“Not as unethical as subjecting students to Severus Snape!”

“Objection,” said Killjoy, despite the fact he agreed with that statement.

“Sustained.”

“My apologies. I have no further questions.”

Finally the person on trial took the stand. He was wearing the same type of black robes that he wore at Hogwarts. He had a sneer on his face as he strutted to the stand. After answering the basic questions of his name and position, Mr. Killjoy began asking the pertinent questions they’d rehearsed. Snape’s answers were as close to friendly as the git was capable of.

“Do you favor students from Slytherin over others?”

“Of course not. What McGonagall and Granger have told you is utter rubbish. I treat all the students fairly.”

“Do you conduct Potions tutoring sessions in the Slytherin common room?”

“I have helped my students when they’ve asked for it.”

“Have you ever tutored a non-Slytherin?”

“I don’t recall which houses the various students I’ve helped in my time at Hogwarts have been affiliated with.”

“Do you perform Legilimency on students without their knowledge or consent?”

“Yes, as a security measure. If I feel a student is up to something, it’s my duty to find out what.”

“What makes you suspect a student?”

“It could be anything. The point is that I suspect them. The Headmaster approves.”

“Are you aware of the falling scores on Potions O.W.L.s?”

“Yes. It is quite tragic that so many students are doing poorly at that subject but are too stubborn to come to me for help. Fortunately, most of those in my own house do come to me so I can help them. As a result, very few students make it to my N.E.W.T. classes.”

Although Snape was doing good at giving his answers, the crowd, including the Wizengamot jury, had heard far too many witnesses for this to do a bit of good. They knew that this man had been a spy either for Voldemort or Dumbledore (one of them was fooled), so he was an extremely gifted liar.

“I have no further questions.”

Sam Gordon then began asking questions. “Why did you find it necessary to rape Harry McGonagall’s mind five minutes after he was sorted?”

Although Snape’s ears turned pink, he remained outwardly calm. “I’d heard he’d had an altercation with my godson Draco Malfoy, and wanted to make sure he wasn’t planning on attacking Young Malfoy.”

“Why did you give Mr. McGonagall a pop quiz during your first class with him, and take house points away because he answered your questions right?”

“I wanted to know the level of Potions knowledge that he’d learned in the American school he’d attended, which was excellent. Unfortunately I’ve found that his skill in brewing Potions leaves much to be desired. The points were taken for his cheek, not for answering my questions.”

Gordon picked up the scroll he’d previously used to show Harry’s Potion final results. “Both Mr. McGonagall and Miss Granger kept an extra vial of their final potion and handed it in to their head of house. He had it tested. This is the result of Mr. McGonagall’s and Miss Granger’s is similar. They are very different from the results you gave them. How do you explain it?”

Snape’s face was getting pink, and his irritation was starting to show as he read the report. “They cheated! They’re both arrogant know-it-alls who think they can get away with anything. They obviously stole a sample from another student’s cauldron.”

“We’ve seen their memories of taking the samples out of their own cauldrons and handing one to you and one to Professor Flitwick.”

“Then they faked it! Pensieve memories can be falsified!”

“By twelve-year-olds? Most fifty-year-old wizards and witches aren’t capable of doing a convincing job of that and you’re saying they can? They must be true prodigies then.” There was mild chuckling in the courtroom as Snape got angrier. Albus was getting nervous. He knew they’d lose all hope if Snape lost his temper. “I’m surprised that geniuses like them can’t handle first year potions, especially since Mr. McGonagall got straight O’s in that class in America, which by the way does grade potion brewing skills.”

“He thinks he knows everything because of that stupid school he went to, not to mention he’s related to the Deputy Headmistress, so he struts around the school like he owns it! He thinks he’s better than everybody else! He’s even decided that he can get me fired, but he can’t!”

Seeing that Snape was losing his temper, Sam decided to bait him some more. "But he is getting you fired. He's planning a victory party tonight."

Snape completely lost control as he stood up with his face red. "Dumbledore won't fire me no matter what I do! I could crucio a student in the Great Hall during a meal and he wouldn't care! He promised me..." Suddenly Severus came to himself and realized what he was saying and closed his mouth as he sat down. Dumbledore, who was now sitting in the audience, was looking horrified.

"What did he promise you?"

"Nothing," said Snape, obviously lying.

"You will answer the question," said Justice Dorigo with a stern look.

"He promised me I would always be able to work at Hogwarts as long as he was headmaster," said Snape with his head down. There were several murmurs across the courtroom as Dumbledore put his face in his hands.

Harry noticed that Lucius Malfoy was now smiling and wanted to know why. It only took him a moment to realize that even though Lucius wanted Snape to stay at Hogwarts, he would use this opportunity to demand Dumbledore's resignation, and he'd be successful. Dumbledore had proven himself completely incapable of treating Hogwarts like a school. Instead, it was a place where he could give secure jobs to his friends, regardless of how they perform those jobs. Logically speaking, Aunt Minnie should be appointed headmistress when that happens, but he was worried that Malfoy may try to pull something off and put one of his friends in the position. He'd have to make sure his aunt openly sought the position.

Mr. Killjoy was the first to give his closing remarks after Snape was seated next to Albus. "I've tried to show that Professor Snape's actions have been justifiable," he said, but it was obvious his heart wasn't in it. He knew what the verdict would be.

Mr. Marcus gave the final closing remarks. "Witches and Wizards, Professor Snape has consistently abused his position at Hogwarts for the past eleven years, and must not be allowed to continue. He has failed in performing his duty of teaching Potions to the point that our world is in jeopardy due to the small number of people receiving N.E.W.T.s in that subject. He invades the minds of students, and mistreats everyone who's not in his house. He is a disgrace to Hogwarts, and a stain upon its reputation that must be removed. We must demand a higher quality of education for our children, and proper instructors are necessary for that. He is teaching the Slytherins that the way to achieve success is by favoritism and cruelty, and this must stop. Members of the Wizengamot jury, I implore you to demand his removal from Hogwarts, for our children's sake."

"The jury will convene to determine a verdict," said Justice Doright. The ten members of the Wizengamot were led out of the main courtroom to discuss the case while the McGonagalls plus Hermione walked up to Sam Gordon and Matthew Marcus, who were preparing to leave once the verdict was reached. Harry didn't notice Lucius Malfoy slightly shake his head 'no' when a member of the jury looked at him questioningly.

"You guys did a good job," commented Harry once they were in earshot.

"This was an easy case. Nobody believes in Snape except Dumbledore. I just hope no one's going to cause a hung jury by refusing to admit the obvious," said Gordon.

"Would they do that?" asked Hermione.

"If they were bribed enough," said Marcus. "However, I think it would be too obvious in this case that the troublemaker had been bribed. It would ruin that person's reputation."

At that moment, after less than ten minutes, the jury reentered the room and declared a verdict. Augusta Longbottom was their spokeswoman. "We the jury in this case have concluded that Severus Snape will be banned from Hogwarts with an injunction against working as a professor for the rest of his life. We also fine both him and Albus Dumbledore the sum of ten thousand Galleons each.

Snape for his conduct and Dumbledore for his extreme negligence. We also recommend that Hogwarts' board of governors reevaluate their faith in the headmaster. The twenty thousand Galleons will be redistributed among every non-Slytherin student that sat under Mr. Snape based off of how many years they endured it. This won't end up being very much money per person, but it is the Ministry's way of apologizing for not putting a stop to Snape's abuses years ago. We also demand that Hogwarts hold extra Potions N.E.W.T. night classes open to the public for the next four years, in hope that some of the former students who have been forced to give up their dreams because of Mr. Snape will pick those dreams back up. Those classes will be free of charge."

There was much clapping in the courtroom until Justice Dorigt called the room to order long enough to say, "Case closed."

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 13 – Justice – Part Two

As Harry and Hermione's families were making their way to the Ministry of Magic's atrium, doing their best to ignore the cameras and questions that the press had for them, an unfamiliar voice shouted happily at them.

"Minerva! Or should I say Deputy Headmistress McGonagall, it's sooo good to see you again!" Harry looked around for the source to see a blond man flamboyantly dressed in light purple dress robes.

"Do I know you?" she asked, as the man grabbed her into a brief one-armed hug. She was too shocked to do anything before he let go of her immediately after a photo was taken. Harry noticed that the stranger had made sure to show his perfect teeth to the camera.

"I suppose I have changed a lot since we last saw each other. My smile has gotten better and my muscles have expanded, but surely you remember your favorite former pupil, Gilderoy Lockhart."

Aunt Minnie's brow furrowed as she tried to recall. "Yes," she said tersely after a few seconds. "I do remember you. Based off your O.W.L.'s you weren't..."

"Yes; I wasn't proud enough for beating even your record," interrupted Lockhart jovially. "When I was informed that the press that was supposed to be at my recent book-signing for my autobiography, *Magical Me*, which incidentally is celebrating its twenty-eighth week atop the Daily Prophet best-seller list, was occupied with this story of my former head of house's struggle against the politics of..."

Minerva looked at him like he was insane. "Weren't you in Slyth..."

"I certainly was *incensed* to learn that one of our peers was abusing his authority..."

"Our peers?" she asked with an annoyed expression.

"Yes, as I'll explain in a minute. I knew I had to show you my support and make my grand announcement here instead of at Flourish and Blotts. I have been contracted to be Hogwarts' new Defense Against

the Dark Arts professor, and will thus insure that my subject shall not fall victim to the poor quality of teaching that Potions has. Not to mention that I'll be on the alert for the slightest hint that any other professor is not up to snuff. Together, Professor McGonagall and I shall protect Hogwarts from corrupt authority figures, so that students shall feel safe to confide in their professors once more."

Harry's group escaped during the applause that followed Gilderoy's 'impromptu' speech. Briefly, the boy wondered how Lockhart would've reacted if he'd known that the 'Boy-Who-Lived' had been less than five feet from him. As it was, he didn't want to see the next morning's Daily Prophet – no doubt with Aunt Minnie hugging Lockhart on the front page. He glanced back in time to see Dumbledore and Snape disappear away without answering any questions. However, Snape had managed to send a venomous look at Harry and Hermione before leaving, which Harry happily noted was photographed. Nothing could ruin Harry McGonagall's mood today! With a genuine smile still plastered on his face, he joined the Grangers in the line at the Visitor's Exit to Muggle London. The rest of his family followed.

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The Grangers and McGonagalls (even Brianna – just for the night) went out to a muggle restaurant that had games for the kids to play, along with an arcade designed to empty parents' wallets, one game at a time, as kids asked for more and more money. When they were on their way home, Minerva noticed something in the sky.

"Idiot!" she said quickly. "It looks like Dedalus Diggle is sending shooting stars again – just like he did when You-Know-Who was vanquished eleven years ago."

"Does that person have family at Hogwarts?" asked Marissa Granger as she admired the magical fireworks.

Minerva nodded. "Yes, a niece in Hufflepuff."

"Then he does have cause to celebrate."

A smile briefly appeared on Minerva's lips. "That he does."

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Later that night, when the McGonagalls had returned to the manor, Harry asked if he could have a private word with his aunt.

“Certainly, Harry,” Minerva said as she got up to walk into a different room. “First of all, I would like to thank you for helping me to rid Hogwarts of that menace.”

Harry grinned at Aunt Minnie. “That was my pleasure.”

She grinned back. “I’d imagine so. What’s on your mind, Harry?”

At this point, her nephew looked down at the floor, as though nervous. “Um, I was wondering, um, if you think Professor Dumbledore is going to get sacked.”

She frowned for a moment before answering. “Truthfully, yes I do. As much as it pains me to say it, he has not been acting in the best interests of the students for over a decade, and therefore hasn’t been a good headmaster since you were a baby.” With a nostalgic look in her eyes, she continued. “Before then, he was the greatest leader our world has ever known, but somehow he changed when Snape came crawling to him. The complaints about Severus started less than a week after he was hired. A few months later the headmaster tried to place you with the Dursleys.”

Harry nodded grimly. “The reason I’m asking is because I think you’d make a great Headmistress.”

She blushed at the compliment. “You flatter me. I was always best at being the second in charge, not the decision-maker.”

“You try to treat everyone fairly, even me. You never favor Gryffindors over anyone, and you honestly want what’s best for the students. You have a lot of experience, the respect of all the students, and your position as Deputy Headmistress makes you the obvious choice! Tell me I’m wrong.”

Still blushing at Harry’s praise, knowing that he actually was right, she responded, “Possibly, but I’m happy with my role as a teacher.”

Harry frowned for a moment. "Everything I said is true, but there is another reason I really want you to try to get that position."

Now Minerva was curious. "Why is that?"

"Did you notice Lucius Malfoy at the hearing?"

Her brows furrowed, and Harry could tell she was thinking. "I noticed he was there. Why?"

"He was smiling when Snape said what Dumbledore had promised him, even though he knew it meant he'd be sacked. I think he's up to something."

"You think he's going to try to place one of his...associates...in the position of headmaster, don't you?" Harry nodded. "I suppose it would be worth sacrificing Snape to do that," she said pensively.

"I thought that if you were pushing that you had earned the position and wanted it, then that might stop him from succeeding." He then grinned at his aunt again. "It would be for the good of the students."

Taking a deep breath, she said, "I shall consider it. I think it's about time you went to bed, young man. You've uncovered enough conspiracies for the evening."

-

Harry spent the next day at Hermione's house. It wasn't the first time he'd been there, but he always enjoyed it. She lived in a two-story house not dissimilar to his own, but the Grangers had a swimming pool. Hermione's mom, Marissa, had the morning off from their surgery, so she joined Harry and Hermione in the pool – mainly playing a game of keep-away (also known as 'monkey in the middle'). It seemed like no matter what Harry did, he couldn't stay out of the 'middle' for more than five minutes. Hermione and her mum enjoyed laughing at his predicament.

After about an hour of that, Harry put his hands up. "I give up. I don't know if it's because it's your pool or what, but I just can't win."

"I think it's because we're faster swimmers," said Hermione with a smug smile.

"Hmm," said Harry, refusing to admit it. "I think I'm ready to get out of the pool."

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After drying off and changing, the two kids ended up sitting on a couch playing Dr. Mario against each other on an original Nintendo.

"Harry, that wasn't nice," said Hermione. "You just ruined what I was doing."

"It's part of the game," he responded with a chuckle.

"I didn't do that to you," she calmly stated.

"Not my fault." At this point he was laughing as he just messed her up again.

"Fine," she said in frustration as she lost that round, "You win. Let's play a different game where you don't attack me."

She turned off her system, pulled out the game, and walked over to the shelf that held her small collection of Nintendo games. Harry noticed the boxes for Mega Man 3, Super Mario Bros. 3, Final Fantasy, Tetris, and Dr. Mario.

"What's Final Fantasy?" he asked.

Her face lit up. "Oh, that's a really good role-playing game. A sequel came out for Nintendo's new system last year while we were at Hogwarts." She looked down. "It takes way too long to play, and it's only one player anyway. We'd be better off with Super Mario Bro. 3."

"Sure. I should've asked my parents to get that game for me before I started spending most of the year far away from home. Maybe Brianna will get my parents to buy a Super Nintendo. It comes with Super Mario World, which is supposed to be even better than this

game. Besides, I heard that next month they're coming out with a Super Mario racing game."

Hermione started the game, playing the role of Mario when Harry decided it was a good time to talk about something else. "Do you have the spells ready? I'd like to do it tomorrow."

It took Hermione a moment to remember, but when she did, her face lit up. "Of course. The paper's in my room." She paused her game and ran upstairs, leaving Harry alone for about two minutes. When she returned, she had a spiral notebook in her hands and a large eagle owl on her shoulder. It had a large beak and enormous talons, but its most noticeable feature was its striking orange eyes. Its brownish plumage was mostly mottled but with bolder streaks on the breast. It looked at Harry and hooted.

Hermione turned to the bird. "Rowena, this is my friend, Harry." She turned to the boy sitting on the couch. "Harry, this is Rowena, the owl my parents bought me."

"Isn't she a bit...heavy for your shoulder? She's bigger than Hedwig."

"A bit, but she won't stay there long." As though she was listening, the owl flew off of Hermione's shoulder and out an open window. "After we got her at the owl emporium, we stopped by the Magical Menagerie to get some owl treats. They're cheaper there. Anyway, I saw this adorable large, fluffy ginger cat named Crookshanks that the owner said people didn't seem to want. I just fell in love with it and asked my parents to buy him as an early birthday present."

"Really?" asked Harry, more interested in the notebook she was holding than some cat, but not wanting to be rude.

"Yes, but my parents said that I need to prove I can take care of Rowena for awhile before they'll let me have another pet. They said they'd consider it at Christmas if Crookshanks is still there."

Sighing, Harry said, "That's too bad. Can I see the notebook?"

Huffing a bit as she realized he really wasn't interested in the cat, she handed him the spiral.

“Aren’t they just a few spells, Hermione?” he asked after browsing through it to find it was half-filled with notes.

“Yes, but I thought you’d want to know the background of the spells. It’s so lucky that you can do magic at your Aunt’s house.” Then her brow furrowed. “Are you sure we should still do this to Brianna? She did confess, after all.”

“Of course,” he said with a grin. “She’d do the same to me. This prank is harmless – it’ll only irritate her.” He chuckled a bit before continuing. “Besides, it’ll show her that she’s still my sister. She’d probably be hurt if I didn’t do this.” He got a faraway look in his eyes. “It’s all for her.”

“Yeah, right,” said Hermione, giggling. She then picked up her controller and unpaused the game.

-

The next morning, Brianna was sleeping soundly when suddenly she felt something touch her face. She slapped it away and awoke immediately as the sound of buzzing filled her ears. She slowly looked around the room as her eyes got wider and wider. The buzzing sound was still filling her ears. “Harry!” she hissed. Her bedroom walls were covered with posters from the baseball team she hated more than any other – the White Sox.

Upon closer inspection, she saw that the posters weren’t tacked or nailed to the walls, which meant they were held by a sticking charm. She walked over to her dresser to see that, “He’s taken my wand! And where’s that buzzing coming from?”

She opened the door and marched over to Harry’s room, pushing it open without bothering to knock. She found him sitting at his desk talking to Hermione on his mirror.

“Good morning, Brianna,” he said with a grin.

“Where is it?” she demanded.

"The morning is everywhere in this hemisphere," responded Hermione from the mirror. "It's night everywhere else."

"You know what I'm talking about, Harry! Give me it!"

Ignoring that statement, Harry smirked at the front of her nightgown. "I'm glad to see you changed teams, Brianna. It was the right decision."

"What are you...GIVE ME MY WAND!!!" she screamed as she noticed that her nightgown had the words '*White Sox Rule!*' in bold letters. Before he could answer, she spotted its tip sticking out from under Harry's dresser and dove to the floor, grabbing it before Harry could summon it away. She glanced back at her brother to see he was talking to Hermione again. "What is that buzzing sound?" she demanded.

He looked up from his mirror. "I don't hear a buzzing sound. I only hear a little sister who's being pranked for the day in retaliation for..."

"Fine, but it's not very creative." She then performed a, "Finite incantatum," on her clothes, getting rid of the offending phrase. "It'll be over in a few minutes."

She marched back to her room and took the posters down. She was surprised at how easily they came off. "He had to have done something else," she muttered to herself. She grabbed some clothes for the day, including her favorite Cubs jersey, and went into the bathroom to take a shower.

After ten minutes under the hot water, she stepped out and dried herself, only to find that the only available towel was advertising the White Sox. "Ha ha," she whispered as she dressed, proudly showing her support for the Cubs.

Suddenly, the buzzing stopped. She looked around and saw a Snitch floating near her forehead, its wings fluttering slightly. Upon closer inspection, she saw that it looked like a miniature winged baseball instead of a golden sphere. She reached out to grab it, only to have it disappear the moment she touched its wings. The buzzing sound resumed, and she realized that it was still near her, but moving too

fast for her to see. She glanced at the mirror on the way to the door only to see that her jersey was no longer advertising the Cubs. It was now a White Sox jersey.

"It must have changed when I touched that stupid Snitch," she muttered as she grabbed her wand.

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Once more wearing a Cubs jersey, the girl exited the bathroom. The buzzing stopped and she could once again see the baseball/Snitch. Shaking her head, she ignored it and walked downstairs to breakfast. The buzzing resumed.

The prank lasted all day, with Brianna getting more and more irritable, but not saying what was wrong. Harry would chuckle every time he saw her getting upset. She only forgot herself twice and touched the winged baseball, and none of the adults were in the room when she did. At seven p.m., the buzzing stopped and she noticed the baseball moving away from her. She followed it to Harry's room, even opening the door for it. She watched the Snitch land inside a small case before Harry put down the book he was reading and performed a 'Finite Incantatum' on the winged ball, turning it into a normal Snitch a moment before closing the case over it.

Brianna smacked her forehead in aggravation as her brother laughed. "All I had to do was perform that spell on the Snitch?" she questioned.

He nodded, unable to talk through his laughter. Her face turned pink. "That was mean! I ought to..."

"You ought to let it go, sis," said Harry firmly. "I told you that you were still getting pranked, and so you have been. Now we're even."

She looked down for a moment in shame over what she'd done to Hermione. "Fine, but if you even *think* of doing something like that again, I'll..."

"...get even. I know. It's nice to be pranking you again, Brianna."

She smiled at him for a moment, turned around, and left the room.

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Harry's birthday party on Wednesday, August 12th. His whole study group (Hermione, Padma, Anthony, Neville, Hannah, and Susan) came to McGonagall Manor for it (Padma and Hermione came early and stayed late). Hermione (and her parents) gave him a Nintendo Game Boy, along with extra batteries and a few games for it (*Mega Man 3*, *Super Mario Land*, and *Final Fantasy Legend*). She was relieved when it worked at McGonagall Manor.

"I wanted you to have some games you could play for the rest of the summer, and I was hoping that maybe it'll work on the Hogwarts grounds if you get far enough from the castle. *Hogwarts, a History* only says specifically that electricity doesn't work..."

"...inside the castle itself," completed Harry. "I never thought about that. If it works outside then we might be able to play muggle music there too – maybe at a picnic or something!"

Minerva looked stunned at the prospect. "In all my years teaching there, I've never heard of a student trying electric gadgets outside. It was always inside the castle."

"It certainly won't hurt to try," said Harry.

He received books, magical candy, and similar presents from his other friends. He got the Game Boy game *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: Back from the Sewers* from Brianna, leading him to believe that she knew what the Grangers were getting him.

After all the guests besides Hermione and Padma left, Minerva gave Harry her gift – a very thick book called, *A Guide to the Animagus Transformation*. She said, "Harry, as you know, you've done extremely well in all your classes, including Transfiguration. I believe that you would be an excellent candidate for becoming an Animagus. If you can keep your grades up, read this book and write a report for me on every chapter before your next birthday, then I'll start giving you private Animagus lessons during your third year. You're not to attempt any of the exercises mentioned in this book without my specific permission."

She looked around to Padma and Hermione, who were staring at her in awe. "This offer goes for both of you as well. I'll leave it up to Harry if and when he loans you his book. I will say that if he doesn't earn the lessons none of you will." She grinned for a moment. "It is my first case of favoritism, but it doesn't count because this is not part of Hogwarts' curriculum. She then looked at her niece. "You'll get the same offer for your third year if you do as well as they have – that is an 'O' in Transfiguration and at least an 'E' in everything else." Padma hadn't broken any records, but had done very well. "This offer and those lessons are to be a complete secret until you're ready to register with the Ministry."

After they all agreed, Harry's parents gave him their gifts. They gave him a traveling case for his Game Boy and a few more games, along with a small cd/cassette boombox with extra batteries. "We figured you could try this out at Hogwarts as well. We brought some of your 'Weird Al' music with so you could try it out. If it works, then tell us what else you want us to send you."

Harry spent Friday, August 14th, swimming, playing video games, and reading his Animagus book with Hermione at her house. The next morning, her family, along with Harry's dad and sister, left for America. The Grangers were just spending a three-day weekend revisiting some of their favorite places (all but Brianna who was still grounded), but they were actually going there to attend Hermione's hearing that Monday. However, Harry wouldn't see Brianna or their father until Christmas.

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Hugging Brianna in the magical part of the airport, Harry said, "Good luck at the trial, Brianna. You're doing the right thing. I love you."

"I love you, too, Harry."

"Take care of yourself, sis."

"I will."

"And stay out of my stuff," he added with a smirk.

"I will," she replied with an innocent expression on her face. "...you won't notice a thing out of place when you come back for Christmas."

Harry then hugged his dad goodbye, and then wished Hermione good luck at the hearing, promising to see her on Tuesday.

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On Monday, August 17, 1992, a group of two men, one woman, and two girls walked into the large courthouse in Little Salem. Each of the girls was holding her father's hand as they made their way along the dark gray tiled floor toward a group of small burgundy carpets in the middle of the half-circular foyer. A nearby sign said, 'Stand on a carpet and state your destination.'

"I guess we ought to, huh?" said Mark McGonagall, while stepping onto the nearest carpet.

"I wonder if they're flying carpets," said Marissa Granger excitedly as she joined Mark.

"I hope so," said Brianna with a smile that temporarily replaced her downcast expression. She hopped onto the carpet.

"They're banned in Britain," commented Hermione nervously as she stepped on it, "so this will be a unique experience."

"Are you sure we can't just walk?" asked Adam Granger as he took a deep breath and joined the others.

Mark cleared his throat. "Er, please take us to courtroom seven."

"Whoa!" they all screamed as the carpet started moving straight up. Hermione barely managed to avoid falling as she looked up toward the ceiling, only just noticing that the only ceiling above them was the actual roof. The carpet took them past the first and second floor in what seemed like five seconds, stopping at the third floor. It was at this moment that they realized their feet were stuck to the carpet. Otherwise they'd have kept going up. The carpet then started moving to the left, crossing the threshold to the third floor and continuing down a hallway. It stopped and landed in front of a set of double-

doors labeled, 'Courtroom Seven.' The whole trip took twelve seconds.

Once the carpet had landed, they found that they could walk freely once more. Adam opened one of the wooden doors, and taking Hermione's hand, he led the way inside. A wizard wearing something that resembled a Marine dress uniform, complete with the white hat, whispered, "This way," to them. They noticed he was wearing a visible wand wrist holster. He led them to a group of about fifty chairs with different people who apparently had been accused of breaking a magical law and were having their day in court. Since there were only about thirty people present, almost half of which were children, they had no trouble finding a place to sit together.

The judge was a stern-looking man with grey hair and a well-trimmed beard. He was wearing black judge's robes that would've fit in if they were in a muggle court. There was no gavel to get people's attention, nor a microphone. There was a projection Pensieve in the middle of the room, as well as a large muggle television with a built-in vcr on a cart with wheels. It was currently in an empty corner of the room, but obviously it could be rolled wherever needed. There was also a pen that seemed to be writing everything that was said down as the fanfold paper kept moving.

As they waited for Hermione's case, they watched as a blond girl about sixteen years old claimed that she thought no one was looking when she apparated directly out of her muggle high-school classroom. She had elected to complete her magical education the way that Harry had started his – going to a muggle school full-time and a magic school part-time. The judge replied with an irritated look, "Twenty-three people had to be obliviated. You have risked the exposure of our world, and exercised very poor judgment. Your fine stands, and your apparition license is suspended for the next six months. Case closed."

"SIX MONTHS?!" she yelled, "That's NOT fair!"

The judge glared at her for a moment. "You're right. Make that a year, and don't yell at me unless you want to be held in contempt of court. Next case."

"I..." shouted the red-faced airhead before falling over petrified. Several of the spectators chuckled softly.

Hermione pointed to the man pointing his wand. "That's the officer who showed us to these seats," she whispered. "I'm glad we didn't resist." They continued watching as the girl was levitated out the door with her parents following and the paper work for the next case was given to the judge.

As they watched each case, they realized that this was the courtroom where all statute of secrecy violations by muggle-born minors were handled (In America you could get an apparition license at sixteen-years old). The adults were all parents, and the fines were given in dollars. One boy had hit a muggle bully with the bat-bogey hex. A girl had accio'd her glasses after some muggle girls had stolen them. For cases of self-defense like them, the perpetrators were fined a hundred dollars and given a written warning about exposing the magical world. Others, who did it for any other reason, were fined a lot more. Brianna got more and more nervous as she imagined what the judge would do to her, but she was determined to tell the truth.

Finally, the judge was given paperwork and a videotape. After glancing at the top paper, the man called out, "The case of the Little Salem magical community versus Hermione Granger is now in session. Is Hermione Granger present?"

Nervously, the bushy-haired girl stood up and began walking toward the center of the room. "I am, your honor."

"Were the people you were sitting between your parents?"

"Yes, sir," she nodded while her parents did the same.

Adam said, "We're Adam and Marissa Granger, sir, and feel that our daughter can speak on her own behalf."

The judge nodded, and turned back to the buck-toothed girl in front of him. "It says here that you are not an American citizen. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir. I'm from England. I was visiting some American friends."

"I see. Did they take you to a muggle baseball game on July 22nd?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are accused of using magic to interfere with the game, causing the baseball team known as..." he looked back at the papers in front of him, "...the Cubs to win. Your wand was identified as the instrument used for this cheating violation of the American Statute of Secrecy. How do you plead?"

Hermione took a breath and rehearsed her reply once more in her mind before speaking. "Not guilty, sir." He looked surprised but she continued before he could say anything. "It was my wand that was used, but I wasn't the one using it. The person who did this is here and wants to confess. She was with me at the game."

"Very well, call her up here."

Hermione looked toward her best friend's little sister and kindly said, "Brianna, would you come down here?"

The obviously frightened girl stood up and started walking toward Hermione. She was slightly trembling. Hermione gave her a small smile and stepped back, allowing the ten-year-old to take her place. She was the youngest child they'd seen take the stand.

"You don't have to tremble so much, child. I haven't had a little girl executed in hours," the judge said with a slight smirk on his face, earning a few chuckles.

"S-s-sorry, sir," she said softly, looking at the ground.

"Please look at me and state your full name for the record."

She looked up and swallowed. "Brianna Minerva McGonagall."

"And when were you born, Miss McGonagall?" he asked kindly.

"March 8th 1982."

"Are your parents here, Miss McGonagall?"

"My daddy is, sir." She pointed out her father.

"Is your daughter an American citizen, Mr. McGonagall?"

"Yes, sir," Mark answered from his seat.

"Very well." The judge turned back to the frightened girl.

"Would you mind telling me what happened at the baseball game?"

Clearing her throat, the brown-haired girl began to tell the story. "You see, sir, we were watching the game. That is my parents, Aunt Minnie, my friend Bobby, my brother Harry, his friend Hermione, and her family were there. In the first inning, I saw that a member of the Cardinals – the team the Cubs were playing against, was cheating magically by summoning the ball."

"Wait a minute," said the judge, "You're claiming that a member of a professional baseball team is magical and cheated?"

"Yes, sir. The name on his uniform is Lightfellow."

The judge made a note on his paper. "Please continue."

She looked down nervously. "Um, I..." She then started blinking her eyes rapidly, as though to stop tears and swallowed. "I, um, took Hermione's wand and waited until just before the game ended and, um, started cheating by summoning the baseball to make sure the Cubs won. I even made Lightfellow's small wand fall out of his baseball glove for a few minutes before he got it again. Anyway, I snuck Hermione's wand back into her pocket just before the policeman caught her." She looked down again as a few tears did start falling down her cheeks. "I, I was too scared to tell him I was the cheater, but I'm admitting it now."

The judge scratched his chin for a few moments. "Thank you for confessing, Miss McGonagall. You may have a seat back with your father while we watch the muggle video of the game." He then turned to the court while one of the officers took the tape from him while another rolled the TV cart to a position where everybody could see it.

Brianna noticed that there was an extension cord that reached across the room to an outlet.

The judge addressed the seated people. "Muggles record many things in their own way using electricity so that they can be watched on their televisions. Baseball is one such thing. Since we had a case pertaining to the game, we acquired a copy of the recording as evidence. We're now going to watch relevant parts of it. I ask that no one use magic during this presentation, as it can interfere with muggle electricity."

The tape was played, skipping the irrelevant parts, and it was quite obvious that Lightfellow was cheating. They didn't focus on what Brianna did (since she'd already confessed it), but instead on the baseball player.

When the video was finished, the judge declared, "We will definitely be speaking to Mr. Lightfellow." Then he turned to Brianna, who had returned from her seat. "While I can understand how you felt watching that man cheat, I can't condone your actions. Two wrongs don't make a right."

Looking at the ground, she said, "Yes, sir. I'll never do it again."

Glancing at Hermione, the judge continued, "Miss Granger, all charges against you have been dropped."

"Thank you, sir," the bushy-haired girl responded with a smile.

"Miss McGonagall, you are hereby fined \$50 that must be paid within a week. Case closed." He pulled out his wand and caused it to make a sound like a mallet hitting a piece of wood.

A different officer led the McGonagalls and Grangers out of the courtroom, giving them both appropriate papers regarding the results of the hearing. The officer led them to a flying carpet that quickly took them first (upon Mark's request) to the appropriate desk to pay the fine, and then to the exit. On the way out, Mark told Brianna how proud he was of the way she handled herself, and for telling the truth, and that he would be deducting the fine from her allowance for the next five weeks. She accepted it without complaint.

“As soon as we get home,” said Mark, “We’re gonna call your mom, Aunt Minnie, and Harry on my mirror.”

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Harry was sitting in the den at McGonagall Manor, playing (and losing) a game of chess against Aunt Minnie, when Blinky popped into the room with something small in his hand. “Blinky is sorry to interrupt Mistress Minnie and Master Harry, but Mistress Breenie, Master Mark and your Grangeys is on Master Harry’s mirror. It is being in Master Harry’s room, so Blinky is bringing it.” The elf held out his hand, revealing Harry’s mirror.

“Thanks, Blinky,” he said as he took the mirror. “Could you please tell my mom that they’re on the mirror? She’ll want to hear how things went, too.” He spoke to the person displayed on it. “Hey, Brianna. How’d it go?”

“I, um, told the judge what happened, and he showed a video tape of the game in the court. He said they were going to investigate Lightfellow, and that the charges against Hermione were dropped.”

“That’s good. I’m proud of you, sis. What did he decide your punishment would be?”

“A fifty dollar fine. Dad already paid it and said he’d take it out of my allowance.”

“That’s not too bad. It could’ve been a lot worse.”

“I know.”

“Are you going to hog the mirror all day?” came Hermione’s happy voice from behind Brianna. “I want to talk to him, too.”

“It’s my mirror. I’d like to talk, too,” said Harry’s dad.

Together, all three of them told Harry, Minerva, and Cindy (who joined them a minute after Harry send Blinky to get her) all about the building, flying carpets, and everything they could think of. Hermione told them that her family was returning at eight in the morning so that

her parents' surgery could open at ten. Cindy and Harry would be there to pick them up (in a muggle taxi – not the Knight Bus), but Minerva would have to be at a meeting at Hogwarts with the Board of Governors.

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“Let the Hogwarts Board of Governors Meeting on the 18th of August, 1992 begin.” The chairman of the board, Augustus Stepover, tapped his wand on a bell, causing it to emit a chime which got everybody's attention and caused a nearby quill to start writing on a parchment. “Let it be noted that all twelve members of the Board of Governors are present, along with Headmaster Albus Dumbledore and Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall.”

The short, thin, balding man was speaking in his raspy voice, his long, gray hair flowing behind him. They were seated in a large classroom on the first floor of Hogwarts, at a table that looked like it was normally in the Great Hall. The room had been charmed imperturbable once everyone arrived.

Minerva was very nervous as she sat near the far end of the table. She noticed that the twinkle was gone from Albus' eyes. He looked older than he ever had before. She'd been to several of these meetings before, but never had she considered nominating herself to be headmistress. She still hadn't decided whether she would do it or not, but she had a scroll with her qualifications in her purse, just in case. Every so often, she would glance at Lucius Malfoy suspiciously.

“The reason for this meeting is that it has been called to the attention of this board that Headmaster Dumbledore has not been acting in the best interests of this school or its pupils for quite some time. It is quite embarrassing that it was brought to our attention in such a public fashion,” he continued, glancing at Minerva.

She spoke up, politely but firmly. “I tried letting you know over six months ago at a meeting, but you refused to believe that things had gotten as bad as they had. Therefore you gave me no alternative but to bring this issue to the courts if I wanted to return Hogwarts to the institution of learning that it was meant to be.” Looking straight at Albus, she continued, “For what it's worth, I'm sorry that it had to

happen the way it did, but I stand by my decision. My primary concern is the welfare of this school and its students.”

“Very admirable,” said Lucius cordially. “I applaud your efforts, Professor McGonagall, in exposing the incompetence of Severus Snape. I’m afraid that I allowed my personal friendship with the man to temporarily cloud my judgment during the meeting you mentioned. For that I apologize.”

She nodded politely, knowing that she couldn’t publicly insult Malfoy if she wanted a chance of becoming Headmistress.

“However,” Lucius continued eloquently, “Headmaster Dumbledore has been letting his personal friendship with Mr. Snape cloud his judgment for eleven years and ignored all the complaints about him, refusing to personally investigate the matter. I hereby make a motion that he be dismissed from his position...” Minerva noticed Albus, who’d been silent thus far, put his head down in resignation. “...and that I be appointed headmaster in his place.” Both Albus and Minerva’s heads snapped toward Malfoy.

Minerva spoke first, doing her best to control her Scottish temper. “With all due respect, Mr. Malfoy, I do not believe you are qualified for that position. For one thing, you have no teaching experience. The head of a school should be someone the students are familiar with. It should be someone that has taught for thirty-five years. Someone who has been head of a Hogwarts house, and deputy to the Headmaster.”

“In other words,” said Mr. Stepover in his raspy voice, “you are suggesting yourself as Headmistress.”

She nodded curtly and said in a steady voice. “Yes. I believe I am the most qualified person for this position.” She glanced over to Malfoy, and to her surprise he didn’t seem upset or annoyed at all. He remained silent while several board members started whispering to each other, glancing at McGonagall every few seconds. She felt like every eye was on her.

After about a minute, Stepover hit the bell again. “We must have order. First of all, it hasn’t yet been decided whether or not Professor

Dumbledore will be dismissed. It is usually customary to let him defend himself before talking about who will replace him. Headmaster, do you have anything to say?"

Looking between Lucius and Minerva, the twinkle returned to his eyes. "While I am forced to admit that I have been wrong in my handling of the situation with Professor Snape, I believe that the rest of my actions have been in Hogwarts' best interests." He raised up a hand when someone wanted to protest. "I know that some of you disagree, and that the debate could go on all night long with no resolution."

He took a deep breath. "I therefore offer a compromise. You may vote on my replacement now. I will retire willingly if and only if Minerva is appointed as my successor. As she has stated, she is the most qualified person for the position and cares so much about the students that she stood up to me. However, if she is not my replacement, then I will fight this, and you will need seventy-five percent of the votes to sack me, which I don't believe you will obtain. I believe that at least four of you still respect the good I have done in my years at Hogwarts enough to overlook one or two mistakes. I am, after all, only human."

"Very well," said Stepover. "We will accept your compromise. However, before the vote I must mention that Minister Fudge, who may I remind you has no power over this Board, spoke to me yesterday and suggested that a his senior undersecretary, a woman named Delores Umbridge, would be an excellent replacement for Professor Dumbledore in the event of his resignation. He gave me her resume." He pulled out a scroll and opened it. Based off of the way that he read the scroll, Minerva could tell he was completely against hiring anyone Fudge suggested but felt obligated to mention her.

"We will now have our vote. Mr. Malfoy, Professor McGonagall, since you two are candidates we ask that you leave the room while we vote. We will, of course, count Mr. Malfoy as having voted for himself. We will allow Headmaster Dumbledore to stay. Although he has no vote, he will be allowed to speak more on behalf of his candidate of choice during the debates that no doubt will begin the moment the door is closed. We'll call a house elf to get you when we're done." The spell

was taken off the door and the two exited. The door was immediately closed.

“Professor McGonagall,” said Lucius cordially, “It seems that we are competitors. May the best one for the job win.”

“Yes. If you’ll excuse me, I have lessons to prepare.” She added as an afterthought. “If I’m appointed headmistress, I’ll still continue teaching until I find a suitable replacement. When one is hired, I’ll offer my lesson plans to that person until they come up with their own.” She quickly walked off, proud of herself for being courteous, and went to her office. She thought about mirroring her family, but decided not to. She’d rather wait until this was over.

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She had just completed updates to her sixth-year curriculum when an elf she wasn’t familiar with popped into the room. “Professor McGonagall. Plankey is being asked to be summoning you back to your meeting.”

She smiled at the elf’s mispronunciation of her name. By now she was used to the fact that house elves couldn’t say ‘McGonagall.’ “Thank you, Plankey,” she said as she got up.

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She found the classroom door open, and walked in and sat in her chair. Albus’ eyes were twinkling madly. She took this as a good sign but kept a neutral expression. Moments later Malfoy entered and the room was resealed.

After sounding the bell once more, Mr. Stepover began speaking. “Professor McGonagall, it is the decision of this board to appoint you to the position of Headmistress. Congratulations.”

A small smile crossed Minerva’s lips. “Thank you.” She glanced over at Lucius to see that he had an unreadable expression.

"I would imagine that your first order of business will be to find a suitable Potions professor, and I suppose a Transfiguration one as well."

"The Potions teacher is my priority. I can handle teaching my subject for awhile until I find someone." She thought about mentioning how poorly it had been taught in the past, but so no point.

"I see. Does anybody here have a suggestion for a replacement?" he said, looking around.

One of the members, a tall, fat man with a vacant expression on his face named Robert Eatalot, spoke up in a very neutral voice. "I know someone who might be qualified. A Potions Master from France named Sharon LaVelle. I can give you her address."

"Thank you," Minerva answered.

The rest of the meeting went by in a blur, although it was quite boring. She wrote her letter to Ms. LaVelle while the others were talking about various unimportant issues like changing the shade of black the students' robes are. When the meeting was over, she was given the address to send her letter. She slowly approached her former boss.

"Albus, how are you?"

"Splendid. Congratulations on your promotion, Minerva."

"W-would you like to accompany me to the owlry? I have a letter to mail."

"Certainly," he said happily.

Once they were out of earshot from the others, Minnie said, "Albus, I..."

"Don't say it, Minerva. I've thought a lot about what was said at the trial." He took a deep breath. "You were right. I was putting Severus' needs above the students. I could have protected him another way without compromising the quality of education here. I'm doing that

now. I found a way to allow him to use his talents and yet be protected.”

“Have you?” she asked, slightly interested.

“Yes. He’s brewing potions at a house under the Fidelius charm. I’ve gotten him a contract to supply potions for some stores in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. He can stay in the solitude that he prefers most of the time.”

“That’s good. What are you going to do now?”

He sighed. “Well, when the Wizengamot isn’t meeting, I believe I’ll start searching for Harry Potter.”

Reinforcing her occlumency shields, she replied, “Harry Potter? Why now?”

“Why not? According to the school’s records, he’s still alive somewhere. I’m the one who placed him in danger, and now that I have the time I have to try to locate him.”

Not trusting herself to say anything about his search, she simply said, “Good luck,” as she tied her letter onto a school owl and sent it off.

“Thank you. If there’s any way that I can be of assistance, let me know.”

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There was a celebration that night when Minerva gave the news of her promotion. She didn’t really feel like celebrating, but knew that it was for the best that she got that position. Harry, especially, was very happy about it.

Over the course of the next two weeks, Headmistress McGonagall spent most of her time away from home. She met and hired Sharon LaVelle as Potions master, telling Harry that she was one of the nicest people she’d ever met. She also found out that Lockhart was indeed contracted to teach for a year and it would be very difficult to break the contract without proof that he was a bad teacher. She

decided to at least give him a chance. Besides, it would be very difficult to replace him now. She decided to hire a seventh-year Ravenclaw named Matthew Shapon as assistant professor to grade Transfiguration papers for the lower years (and possibly lecture) to free up some of her time. She hadn't found any suitable replacement for herself yet, although she thought that Matthew might be a possibility after he graduates if she can't find anybody for a whole year.

She was surprised, though pleased, to receive a report on chapter one of the Animagus book from each member of the Golden Trio before school started. She'd thought that all Harry was doing was playing his Game Boy.

The first time she walked into her new office was August thirty-first. She'd been avoiding it as long as possible, working from her old office. She'd ordered an elf to bring her stuff there earlier that day. She was startled by a new portrait on the wall. Albus Dumbledore's image was sleeping inside a frame. "What?" she whispered to herself. "How? I thought..."

The portrait of Headmaster Dippet answered her question. "When a headmaster or headmistress dies, a portrait appears and wakes up within a few weeks. However, when one retires, his or her portrait appears, but stays asleep until that person passes away. If you need advice from Albus Dumbledore, I'm afraid you'll have to speak to the real one. I suppose this happens mainly so that the portraits stay in the right order. Otherwise they could die in the wrong order."

"I see. Well, I suppose I'd better get used to the new office." She sat down on her new chair and took a deep breath. This was going to be an interesting year.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 14 – Introductions

“Goodbye, Harry. Have a good term.”

“I will, Mom,” Harry said as he returned Cindy McGonagall’s hug. It was ten minutes before the Hogwarts Express would be leaving. Next to him, Hermione was hugging her mother. It was a Tuesday, so one of the Grangers had to keep their surgery open. Therefore her dad wasn’t able to see her off. The four of them (Cindy, Harry, Marissa, and Hermione) had driven to the station together, and had crossed the barrier to Platform Nine and Three Quarters moments before.

“I guess we’d better hurry if we’re going to get a compartment,” said Hermione when she separated from her mum.

Together, they walked onto the train. Harry graciously let Hermione stick her trunk into his magically charmed seven compartment trunk that always weighed ten-pounds, so he was the only one carrying luggage. Once they had a compartment, they’d remove her trunk so it would be placed in her dorm with the rest of the students’ trunks.

“I’m sorry I delayed us so much,” said Hermione after they’d walked past ten full compartments. They’d seen their study group sitting with others. Padma and Neville seemed apologetic, saying that they’d tried to save them a seat, but they were just too late and others had filled up the compartment.

Harry smirked at her. “I know. Once you found out that you could use my trunk, we had to go back to your house to get the books you’d left behind – especially *Hogwarts, A History*.”

“They’re very helpful,” she said defensively, “and I couldn’t fit them in my trunk because of all the Lockhart books.” She glanced at the floor as her ears turned pink. “Can you imagine writing all those books, not to mention doing all those things in them? Professor Lockhart is very brave, and...”

“Lies very well,” interrupted Harry. “My aunt says he was a Slytherin – not a Gryffindor like he claimed – and that he was at the bottom of his class! He dropped out of Hogwarts after failing too many O.W.L.s.”

She looked shocked. "B-but then he must have studied independently. He's probably terribly embarrassed about his past, so he...er, embellished it a bit."

Harry stopped in his tracks and stared at his best friend. "Embellished? Embellished? Hermione, he lied to the Daily Prophet, and who knows what else he's lied about?"

"Fine," she sighed. "I won't try to convince you. I'm sure you'll change your mind after we've had a few lessons. I'm sure we'll learn a great deal from him."

At this moment, they looked into a department that was mostly empty, aside from two girls sitting about four feet apart who appeared to be first-years. One was rather short and had long, auburn hair. She was busily writing in a small book she was holding in her lap. The other had long, straggly, blonde hair, and was holding an issue of the *Quibbler* in front of her face at a forty-five degree angle.

"Hello," came a voice from behind the magazine, causing the red-head to look up and quickly close her book to stare at the two second-years.

"Oh, um, hello," said Harry. "This is Hermione Granger, and I'm Harry McGonagall."

"My brother, Ron Weasley, told me a bit about you two," said the other girl. "I'm Ginny."

"He mentioned having a younger sister last year," said Hermione. "It's good to meet you. I'm surprised you're not sitting with him."

"He's too *grown up* to sit with his *baby sister*."

Harry felt a bit of frustration with Ron at that moment. He fully intended to look out for Brianna when she started coming, beginning with their carriage ride. Without commenting on that, he turned to the magazine-girl. "And you are?"

The *Quibbler* was placed on the other girl's lap, revealing a face with protuberant silvery grey eyes with very faint eyebrows. She was

wearing a necklace with butterbeer corks on it and radish-shaped earrings. Her wand was behind her ear. "I'm Luna Lovegood. You both were mentioned in the *Quibbler*. I admire you both for testifying that both Professor Dumbledore and Snape had been possessed by Squargles and were eating House Elves in that trial, and couldn't believe that the Daily Prophet didn't mention it."

Both Harry and Hermione stared at the blonde girl in silent disbelief for a few moments until Ginny made a motion with her eyes that her companion wasn't quite normal. Harry cleared his throat. "Anyway, um, we were wondering if we could share your compartment. Everywhere else is full."

"Sure," said Ginny, whose ears were getting a bit pink. "You can sit here."

As they were walking toward the seat opposite from Ginny, Luna said to Harry, "You don't look like a natural blonde. I think you'd look better with darker hair."

Ginny started looking at him with a concentrated expression, undoubtedly picturing what he'd look like with black hair. Hermione wore a neutral expression. Harry nearly had a panic attack. He felt like he was wearing a 'Boy-Who-Lived' t-shirt. "Um, well this is the only color hair I can remember having."

"I see," said Luna with no expression as she picked up her paper again.

Ginny was twirling a strand of hair on her finger nervously as Harry sat down opposite of her. "I, er, heard about that House Elf group that you two started."

Hermione grinned. "The Community for Advancing the Rights of Elves. C.A.R.E. for short. You see..."

The brunette went off with her explanation of the group while Harry pulled two packets of literature and badges out of his trunk. Ten minutes later, both Ginny and Luna had bought them, although Luna had made a rather strange comment about House Elves originating from cursed Hobbits rather than actual Elves.

Eventually, the conversation moved on to Quidditch, where Harry declared, "I'm going to try out for Seeker on my house team."

"I'm sure you know that my brothers, Fred and George, are the Gryffindor Beaters."

"Yes," said Harry, nodding, "and they're really good. It's too bad that Ravenclaw's gonna..."

"Gonna be shut out by Gryffindor!" proclaimed Ginny proudly.

"Wanna bet?" asked Harry.

"Five knuts says Gryffindor beats Ravenclaw when they play."

Harry would've preferred to bet a Galleon, but he knew that the Weasleys weren't very wealthy, so he didn't want to embarrass Ginny by commenting on how small of an amount that was. "You're on."

While they were shaking hands, Hermione commented, "Wouldn't it be funny if you ended up in Ravenclaw after betting against us?"

"No way! I'm going to be in Gryffindor."

"I'd like to be in Ravenclaw," said Luna. She then turned toward Hermione. "Are you going to try out for the Quidditch team as well?"

With her face turning a bit pink, she said, "Well, I'm not as good a flier as Harry, but I thought I might try out for the Chaser position. I'll be borrowing Harry's broom for the tryouts, and if I make the team, my parents promised to get me a broom."

"I almost hope you do make the team, Granger!" Draco Malfoy's sneer came from just outside the compartment. As usual, he was flanked by his bodyguards. Harry immediately summoned his original wand into his hand. "A lot of people get injured during Quidditch, especially filthy, ignorant mudbloods who think they understand flying."

While Draco was talking, Harry whispered a spell with his wand pointed at Draco's feet. He then turned to Hermione with a mock-

pitying tone of voice. "Didn't that just hurt your feelings soooo much? Being called that by a filthy inbred."

"Oh, yes," she agreed melodramatically. "I shall have to cry for days."

Malfoy hissed as he pointed his wand at her, "You should be crying, you filthy...ahhh!"

At that moment, he fell forward. Harry had done a minor sticking spell to the soles of Draco's shoes. When he tried stepping forward, he couldn't pick up the shoes, so consequently, he'd lost his balance. While he was falling forward, the charm was overpowered by his bodyweight and let go of the floor.

"Bowing to Hermione again," said Harry with a smirk as he summoned Draco's wand yet again. He looked over at the two goons. "Maybe you should join Malfoy on the ground."

They looked at each other in confusion until Draco shouted, "Help me up, you idiots!" Both bent down to help him at the same moment, and with a bit of unnoticed help from Hermione's wand, the two banged their heads together. With one hand holding their head, and the other helping their alpha off the floor, they managed to get Draco up.

"I really ought to toss your wand out the window," said Harry casually.

"I'll bet you really think you're something, now that your aunt is Headmistress! You just wait! My father'll..." He shut his mouth with a look of fear momentarily crossing his face, replaced immediately by a sneer. "Give me my wand, McGonagall!" He held out his hand.

"Your father will what?" Harry growled as he grabbed Draco and pressed him against the wall.

"What's going on here?" said a voice none of them expected. They all turned to see Percy Weasley.

"Harry McGonagall stole my wand," said Draco with a smirk. "He said that he can do anything he wants now that his aunt's in charge of the school."

“That’s a lie!” said Hermione. “Malfoy came here threatening us with his goons.”

“It is not!” said Draco. “Crabbe and Goyle heard it, too.” The goons nodded their heads.

“They’re lying!” said Ginny to her brother. “They came into our compartment and interrupted our conversation to start calling Hermione a mudblood!”

Ignoring Ginny, the self-important prefect said, “I’m taking five points from Ravenclaw. Mr. McGonagall, let go of Mr. Malfoy and give him his wand back. I will be reporting this to your head of house. I suggest you all change into your school robes. We should be at Hogwarts soon.”

“But Percy,” shouted Ginny as the pompous git turned around and left the compartment, followed by the Slytherins. Once the door was closed, she proclaimed, “That stupid git! My brothers were right! That prefect badge is cutting off the circulation to his brain!”

Hermione added, “I’d think that he’d be careful about how he deals with the headmistress’ nephew.”

“Malfoy’s father is on the board,” said Harry, “so he probably thinks that we’re equals, and he dislikes me.”

“But he won’t even listen to me,” said Ginny, pouting.

“The Malfoy family has much more clout at the Ministry,” said Luna, gazing into space. “They’re involved with Minister Fudge in the Goblin-pie conspiracy.”

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Harry left the compartment to change in the toilet, while the three girls changed where they were, and soon the train arrived in Hogsmeade. Before long, Harry and Hermione were sharing a carriage after Madam Grubbly had called their new friends to the boats.

Just before it took off toward the castle, Padma Patil and Neville Longbottom climbed aboard. "Hi guys," she said to her fellow Ravenclaw second-years. "I'm sorry we couldn't save you a seat earlier, but..."

"That's alright," said Harry. "We barely made it on time. We don't blame you for making sure that you had a seat." Harry pulled a small object out of his pocket and turned it on.

"What's that?" asked Padma, before a look of understanding crossed her face. "Is that the...what was it called...game...that Hermione's family gave you at the party?"

Harry smiled at her. "Yes. It's the Game Boy. I just wish it was lighter out. I wish I could use my wand without interfering with it. Anyway, I'm trying to see how long until the magic interferes with it." He was getting more and more engrossed with Super Mario Land as his thumbs kept rapidly moving while the others talked. They were already well inside the grounds when the screen finally filled up with all kinds of weird symbols, signaling that it was no longer functioning properly. "Shoot! I had just about beaten the castle, too!" As he turned off the game system, he looked around, seemingly pleased with how close to the castle they were. He turned to Hermione. "It looks like you were right about electricity working near the castle. I'll bet it'll work in Hagrid's old hut."

A look of excitement crossed Hermione's face. "Oh, that would be perfect! Professor Grubbly doesn't use it. She stays in the castle. If your aunt would give us permission...we could clean it up to use! Maybe we could even make it a C.A.R.E. office!" Her eyes then lit up. "Maybe the Muggle Studies professor would like to use it to demonstrate electricity occasionally."

"Okay," said Harry. "We'll talk to her after the feast. If we can get the keys, I'll even keep my electric stuff there."

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Before long, they found themselves sitting at the Ravenclaw table. They'd watched the sorting with interest. After Benjamin Cadwallader was sorted into Hufflepuff, a rather short boy with mousy brown hair

named Colin Creevey was called. Harry couldn't believe that the boy had taken a picture of the sorting hat before putting it on, and tried to persuade Professor Flitwick, who was now Deputy Headmaster, to take his picture while he was being sorted. In the end, another first year took the photo as Colin happily put on the old hat and was sorted into "Gryffindor!" As the excited boy made his way toward the appropriate table, which was politely clapping, though not enthusiastically, he noticed that the camera was very similar to the one that Mr. Granger had bought the previous year in Diagon Alley.

They watched the others with mild interest as they were sorted, clapping when one made their house. A brunette girl with green eyes named Sally Fawcett became a Ravenclaw just before a blonde boy named Mark Harper became a Slytherin.

When Luna Lovegood's name was called, she walked up to the stool with the same blank expression on her face that she always had and put the hat on. After about thirty seconds, it declared that the unusual girl belonged in, "Ravenclaw." She took off the hat and walked over to their table. Harry signaled for her to join them.

When she sat down next to Hermione, she announced, "That hat was infested with nargles." Harry grinned as he agreed that the old hat was probably infested with something. They introduced her to their other friends as the sorting continued.

The last person sorted this year was Ginny Weasley. With a determined expression on her face, she walked up to the hat and put it on. It almost immediately shouted, "Gryffindor," as though it knew she would accept nothing else. Harry smiled as he realized that the hat did know that. He then turned his attention to the podium, where his aunt was about to make her first speech as Headmistress.

"Welcome newcomers and returning students alike. As you can see, there has been a change in Hogwarts' administration during the summer. Professor Dumbledore has decided to retire, and now I am Headmistress. The rest of the announcements can wait until after the feast. Tuck in." With a small smirk, she waved her hand in a grand gesture, and food appeared at all the tables.

Harry happily grabbed a chicken leg, and began his meal. When they were finished eating, Minerva once again took the podium.

With her normal, stern look, she began. "Probably the most important announcement to the Gryffindors is that Professor Aurora Sinistra of Astronomy is now their head of House." This announcement was followed by mild applause from Gryffindor table. The elderly witch nodded toward them as her ears turned pink. "As Professor Snape is no longer here," At this moment, tremendous applause came from the three non-Slytherin tables. After it died down, she continued.

"As I was saying, his responsibilities have been given to others. Most important for the Slytherins, is that Professor Hezekiah Kettleburn of Care of Magical Creatures is your new head of House. We are also pleased to welcome Professor Sharon LaVelle from France as Potions Mistress." She motioned to an attractive, middle-aged woman with black hair, brown eyes, and a bright smile.

"Defense Against the Dark Arts is being taught this year by Gilderoy Lockhart." She frowned at the applause that came from most of the girls. She then motioned to a young man wearing Ravenclaw robes who was sitting at the head table. "Also, Matthew Shapon, in addition to his N.E.W.T. studies, has been given the position as Assistant Professor, and will be assisting me in Transfiguration classes. He has the same authority as Head Boy, and can take points and give detentions, so I expect you to treat him with the same respect you would me."

"The dark forest remains forbidden, as some of you would be wise to remember." Her eyes darted toward the Weasley twins, and Harry wondered what she'd say if she found out he'd ridden his illegal broom in there the previous year. "Magic is still forbidden in the corridors, and there is a rather extensive list of forbidden items in Mr. Filch's office. That is all. Good evening."

Harry and Hermione got up and walked over to the head table. "Headmistress," said Harry with a grin, "Can we talk to you for a minute?"

"Certainly, Mr. McGonagall," she replied. "What's this I hear about you getting in trouble on the train?"

“What?” he asked. “Oh. That. Malfoy came to our compartment causing trouble, and that idiot, Percy Weasley, came by and took his side. He wouldn’t even listen to his little sister. She was with us. I’d be glad to give you that memory.”

“I’d appreciate that.” She then conjured a vial and Harry gave her the memory. “I want to see how Mr. Weasley handles his responsibilities. He’s on the short list for Head Boy next year. However, I’m afraid that if I return those points directly to you, it may cause trouble.” Harry looked confused. “Malfoy will say I’m favoring you. Therefore, I’ll simply add a few extra points to any Ravenclaws this week who earn them in my class. I’ll speak to Professor Flitwick about it. He knows how young Malfoy loves to cause trouble.”

Harry smiled. “Thanks, but that’s not what we wanted to talk about.”

“Oh. Then what is it?”

Hermione answered, “Is anybody using Hagrid’s old hut?”

“No. Why?”

“Well,” said Harry, “My Game Boy worked almost all the way to the school, so I wanted to find a safe place to use electronic things...”

“And we thought it could double as headquarters for C.A.R.E.”

“You’d like to take it over?” the Headmistress asked. They nodded. “I don’t see why not. I’ll send someone there to make sure it’s safe, and then you’ll be responsible for cleaning it.” The kids had matching smiles. “I’d imagine you’ll want to replace the furniture with something of a more...appropriate size. And you won’t need the bed.”

“Thank you,” said Harry.

“I suppose you’ll occasionally want to hold social gatherings there to use your music.”

“Yes, Professor,” said Hermione. “We also thought that the cabin could occasionally be used for a Muggle Studies demonstration.”

Minerva looked thoughtful. "That would be a good idea. I shall bring it up at the next staff meeting. Let me know in advance if you're going to have more than ten people there. I'll let you know when the place has been *checked* for dangerous creatures." Harry didn't understand the sneaky expression on his aunt's face.

"Thanks a lot, Aunt Minnie."

"You're welcome, Harry. Oh, and it may interest you to know that the password for Ravenclaw tower is *Omniscience*."

"Oh, yeah, thanks," Hermione said, blushing. "We forgot to ask."

"I thought as much. Good night, you two."

"Good night."

As the two of them turned to leave, Harry caught a glimpse of an elf behaving rather strangely. Instead of working – for example, cleaning up a mess – it was against a wall looking at him. Harry blinked and it was gone, so he shook his head, supposing he'd imagined it, and began walking toward Ravenclaw Tower.

They were about half-way to the tower when there was a loud bang in a nearby classroom. Harry's wand was in his right hand almost immediately. "Stay here, Hermione. I'm gonna see what's wrong."

"Oh, no you don't," she said, with her wand out as well, "I'm going, too."

With his companion right behind him, Harry stepped into the dark classroom. He heard a finger snap, and the door slammed behind them.

From behind him, Hermione said, "What is goin...." CRASH!!!

He turned around to see that where she should be was a structure the size of a wardrobe. She was obviously trapped inside it.

The room lit up, and a house elf wearing what appeared to be an old, filthy pillowcase, stepped out of the shadows. She had several bruises all over her body.

“Let Hermione go!” Harry demanded as he angrily pointed his wand at the elf.

“Your Hermy is safe. I is Tribly,” she said, “and you is being Harry Potter.”

He stopped in his tracks. “What?”

“I is having terrible news. There is a plot. Hogwarts is not safe! Harry Potter must be leaving!”

“Who’s plotting what?” he asked.

“Tribly is hearing master plotting terrible things to happen at Hogwarts, but is being happy that Harry Potter isn’t at Hogwarts. Today, Tribly is using elf magic to locate Harry Potter, just to be sure, and finds that Harry Potter is at Hogwarts. Tribly is distressed! Harry Potter must go home!”

Harry lowered his wand. “Who is your master, Tribly?”

“Tribly must not be telling.”

He squatted down next to her and kindly asked, “Is your master the one who hurt you,” while indicating her bruises. “That’s now illegal.”

“Tribly is knowing the law, but mustn’t speak ill of her master. If he is losing another elf from care...”

“Another elf!” repeated Harry as the elf put her hands over her mouth. “The only one who’s lost an elf because of C.A.R.E. is Malfoy.” The elf’s eyes bulged out. She quickly snapped her fingers and disappeared. At the same moment, the walls around Hermione disappeared and the door to the classroom opened.

“What’s going on?” asked Hermione, looking scared.

"The Malfoy's are up to something."

-

Harry told Hermione what happened, and she insisted on telling his aunt the next day. Harry decided not to tell the rest of his family when he spoke to them that night.

At breakfast, they found out that they had Potions first period.

"This should be good. Aunt Minnie says that Professor LaVelle is really nice."

"That should be a nice change," said Padma.

"We might actually learn something in class," said Hermione, "What a concept."

"I hope Professor LaVelle isn't suffering from psaterics. That would cause her to grow horns when she inhales fumes from certain potions," said Luna, who was sitting with them. Padma and Michael Corner stared at her.

"Um, me, too," said Harry. "I think it's time to go. Good luck with your first day, Luna."

"Thank you," she said politely as they left.

As soon as they'd exited the Great Hall, Michael whispered, "That girl is loony."

"Maybe a bit," said Harry, "but she means well. She's not hurting anybody. I'd much rather deal with ten of her than one Malfoy, so save your insults for him."

"Alright, alright," he said, "Sorry. I didn't know you fancied her." Hermione paled at that statement.

"I don't fancy her," said Harry, without so much as the slightest blush. "I just don't see any reason to be unfriendly. She hasn't done anything to you." Hermione smiled.

-

They arrived early for their first Potions lesson with their new professor. When it was time, she said, "Good morning, class. My name, as you all know, is Professor LaVelle." She spoke with a very slight accent that was hard to detect. Harry thought she sounded a bit nervous, which was understandable since it was her first class. "I'm going to take attendance before we get started." She then named off the students, beginning with Hannah Abbot of Hufflepuff, the house that the Ravensclaws were sharing Potions with.

"Now, as I understand it, Potions hasn't been properly taught here. The records my predecessor left indicate that you did complete several potions last year, but I'm willing to bet that you never went over the reasons why certain ingredients work together. Am I right?" They all nodded. "Very well. Everyone, get out a new parchment and a quill. We're going to make a chart."

After everyone was ready, she said, "The first potion you made last year was to cure boils. Can anyone name an ingredient in it?"

Both Hermione and Harry stuck their hands in the air, along with several other Ravensclaws.

"Mr. McGonagall?"

"Porcupine quills."

"Correct. One point to Ravenclaw. Everyone put that on your chart. Now the properties of porcupine quills are..." She explained exactly what its properties were and what it did in that potion. For the rest of the lesson, they went over different ingredients for the potions they'd made the previous year. It was very informative. Near the end of class, she said, "For the next lesson, we'll be making the Deflating Draught. I want each of you to hand in a report with an introduction that explains what the potion does, at least a paragraph about the properties of each ingredient, followed by an explanation of how they work together to form that potion. No less than two feet of parchment." Everyone but Hermione groaned. "Class dismissed."

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 15 – Practice and Preparation

The next class they had was Herbology with the Slytherins, where they learned how to repot Mandrakes. Harry found it rather amusing when he noticed one of the baby Mandrakes try to bite Draco's finger off. *'Too bad Malfoy's wearing gloves,'* he thought. He further wondered what Draco would say if he knew his own elf was betraying his family. *'How on earth can they be so stupid as to expect an elf they beat to be loyal?'* He wisely didn't say anything about it in that room, for fear of the pompous idiot overhearing.

Before long, Harry, Hermione, and Padma were sitting together at the Ravenclaw table for lunch.

"Are you gonna tell your Aunt about the Malfoy's elf in Transfiguration class?" whispered Padma.

"I'll ask to talk with her and show her the memory."

"Can I come," asked Hermione. "All I saw were walls."

Harry smiled slightly. "Yeah. I think she was trying to protect my identity," he whispered. "She didn't know if you knew, and didn't want to give it away. I think she does understand that I am safer if no one knows who I am."

"Probably," whispered Padma. "Can I come, too?"

-

After lunch, they headed to the Transfiguration classroom, where they were surprised to see Matthew Shapon sitting at Aunt Minnie's desk. Harry glanced around the room, looking for either his aunt or a cat, with no success. He frowned. He supposed he'd have to wait until dinner to talk to his aunt. The Assistant Professor stood up, smiling nervously.

"Hello, everyone. I'm Professor Shapon. As you know, Professor McGonagall is now Headmistress, and has many important, time-consuming duties to perform. Sometimes, like today, she'll ask me to teach the class for her. She asked me to remind you that the same

rules that apply when she's here also apply when she's not, which means no messing around." He then took a roll of parchment of the desk. "I'm now going to take attendance."

After roll call, he began teaching them how to turn a beetle into a button, which Harry and Hermione did on their first try, earning Ravenclaw two points each. It took until Padma's second attempt, because the button from her first attempt moved just as Matthew got to her desk to inspect her work. Harry noticed that Padma seemed to slightly blush whenever she had the Assistant Professor's attention.

-

As the trio was headed down the stairs on the way to dinner, Harry stopped suddenly. "What's that?" he asked, pointing at a tiny electric blue creature flying in front of them holding a portrait.

"I don't know," said Padma with a smirk, "but it's got a picture of Lockhart."

"That looks like a pixie," said Hermione, but how..."

At that moment, Neville Longbottom came running up the staircase with his wand out. "Immobulus!" he shouted, sending a clever freezing charm Hermione had taught them in their study group the previous year at the tricky little blighter, causing it to stay where it was. "Got it!" he said happily as he took a step toward it, only for his foot to fall through the trick stair.

"What happened?" asked Harry as he walked toward his friend.

"Lockhart, that's what. First, he gave us a pop quiz about his favorite color and other rubbish like that. Then, he let loose a bunch of Cornish Pixies on us. Once they got his wand, he ran for it! They picked poor Ron up and hung him from the chandelier."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at that picture as he helped Longbottom out of his predicament. Hermione, who was now holding the painting of Lockhart and gazing at it dreamily said, "That's not funny, Harry. Not funny at all. I'm sure that Professor Lockhart simply wanted to give you all a hands-on lesson, and his quiz was just to see how

closely you read his books. In *Year with the Yeti*, he clearly stated that his favorite color is lilac, just like the attractive suit he's wearing in this picture."

Harry blinked. He couldn't believe that his best friend was so smitten with that fraud that she'd make excuses for losing his wand to a pixie and running away. He turned back to Neville. "Are the rest still flying around the school?"

"No. That was the last of them," he said, taking the now portrait-less pixie. He turned to Hermione with a mischievous smirk. "Shall I leave you with the portrait and tell Lockhart that it's gone?"

"Ye...No. No, or course not. Don't be ridiculous. Here you go." She said all that without taking a breath as she hastily returned it. Harry, Padma and Neville all got a good laugh at Hermione's expense. Her face was completely pink.

"Er, I can't wait until dinner. Do you think they'll have roast beef?" She walked ahead of them, barely managing to avoid the trick stair.

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"Thank you for bringing this to my attention," said Minerva as she, Harry, Hermione and Padma exited her Pensieve. They'd spoken to her during dinner and she invited them to her office.

"So, you see why we think Lucius Malfoy is up to something," said Harry.

"Especially in light of what Draco started to say on the train," added Hermione.

"I certainly agree that it looks that way," said Minnie, "but for now, I believe that all we can do is keep our eyes open and wait for something to happen."

"Isn't there something you can do?" asked Padma. "Can't you drag the little ferret in here and make him drink veritaserum?" By the expression on Harry's face, she knew that he agreed with that plan.

"I'm afraid not," said Minerva. "There are limits to what a Headmistress can get away with, and the use of that potion on a student is strictly forbidden. Lucius Malfoy would have me sacked and in Azkaban faster than you can say, *illegal*."

"I suppose so," agreed Harry, reluctantly. "Did you hear about Lockhart's first lesson with the Second-Year Gryffindors?" he added, changing the subject.

Minerva's lips thinned. "Yes. I even saw some of his students running around chasing pixies. I can't understand what that idiot was thinking!"

Hermione looked scandalized. "Headmistress! Even though his teaching methods may be a bit...unusual, I'm sure that they learned a lot. I don't think it's polite to refer to him as an idiot just because you..."

"You're quite right, Hermione. It was improper. I apologize. It's not good policy to speak ill of my colleagues, no matter what I think of them, and I shouldn't encourage you to disrespect them."

"Don't worry, Aunt Minnie. I don't need any encouragement to disrespect Professor Lockhart."

"Harry!" hissed Hermione.

"Young man," said Minerva sternly, with only the slightest hint of a smile that only those closest to the headmistress could detect, "Listen, and listen good. Don't let me catch you pulling any pranks on Professor Lockhart. The consequences would be severe."

"Yes, Aunt Minnie," he said submissively. He didn't add, "*I won't let you catch me at it*," even though that's what he was thinking and knew that's exactly what his aunt meant.

"Although it would be interesting to see how he deals in person with the situations he's described in his books," she added.

"Yes," agreed Hermione dreamily, "It would be amazing to see first-hand how heroic he is."

It was all Harry could do to stop himself from losing his dinner right there. He rolled his eyes at his aunt, and she winked at him. He almost burst out laughing.

"Indeed," said Minerva. "Now, if that's all you'd like to discuss..." They nodded. "I've got a bit of parchmentwork to fill out before turning in."

-

The next morning, Harry was waiting in the common room for Hermione and Padma when Luna Lovegood came walking up the stairs.

He politely said, "Good morning, Luna."

She was wearing her school robes, but had one white shoe and one black one. She answered, "Good morning, Harry," with her normal vacant expression and started looking around the common room, causing some of the girls who were downstairs to snigger.

He watched her look behind a plant in the corner and under a couch before he decided to interrupt her. "Looking for nargles?" he asked.

She stopped, got up, and looked at him. "Not precisely, but I do suspect that they're behind it. Some of my clothes, half of my shoes, some parchment, and two of my books are gone."

"What?" he asked shocked.

"Yes. Nargles sometimes steal things. It's in their nature."

Harry was mad. He couldn't believe there were thieves there. "Was everything in your dorm room when it vanished?" he asked.

"Yes. I think the nargles struck last night."

He pulled out his wand. "Accio, Luna's stolen things."

While several items, including the mates to both shoes Luna was wearing, came up the staircase, a few things came out of the pockets and bags of the older girls that were already in the room. A roll of

parchment came out of the bag of a female fifth-year prefect who was talking to Penny Clearwater. Harry saw them both follow it to him as the other girls gathered around him as well.

“Harry,” asked Penny, “what are you doing, taking these girls’ things?”

He glared at her, not knowing whether she was part of this or not. “I’m not stealing anything! I simply summoned the things that were stolen last night from Luna!”

As he put the parchment in Ms. Lovegood’s already full arms, Penelope looked at her fellow prefect, who looked guiltily to the ground. Clearwater looked around at the other female Ravenclaws who’d lost contraband to Harry’s summoning charm. All it took was one look to confirm the truth to Penny as the rest of the girls started making their way up into the common room. “I, I can’t believe you all! Robbing a first year! Especially you, Roberta! You just made prefect! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!”

“Lighten up, Penny. It’s just Loony...”

“What terrible thing has she done to you to deserve this?!” Harry yelled. He then added, “You SLYTHERIN thief!”

“Now listen here, boy!” Roberta said, “Just because your aunt is...”

“This has nothing to do with my aunt, you thief! Didn’t your mom ever tell you that stealing is wrong?”

“It was just a joke!”

“No! I love pranks, but this wasn’t one. It was theft! Besides, pranks are for the deserving, like Filch, who goes around talking about how he wants to hang us all by our thumbs! Luna hasn’t done anything to you!”

“Harry,” said Luna evenly, “It’s alright. You don’t have to...”

“What’s going on?” asked Hermione, who just arrived. Harry saw that Padma was with her.

“Half the girls, including this *prefect*, robbed Luna last night.” He acted disgusted when he indicated Roberta.

Hermione’s eyes widened as she looked at the fifth-year. “Even you? You’re supposed to set an example!”

Harry noticed that Hermione was close to losing her temper, and he didn’t want any hexing to start, mainly because he wasn’t sure he could take out a fifth-year. He did still have his wand out – just in case. “I think we’ve got things under control now, don’t we, Penny?”

“Yes, I think so.” She looked each of the thieves that had been caught in the eyes. “I’ve never been ashamed to be in this house before today. “Fifty points from Ravenclaw!”

“Fifty?” questioned Roberta. “You can’t take that many away! I’ll...”

“You’ll what, *Roberta*? Complain to Flitwick that I didn’t allow you to rob a first-year! He’ll take away your badge if he finds out, and I’ve half-a-mind to tell him! I can’t believe you were a part of this! I trusted you!”

“You can’t!”

“I won’t tell him about this incident...this time,” said Penny calmly. “But if any one of you does something like this again, I’ll make sure you spend the rest of the year mopping the floors with your tongue while Filch supervises.” She then turned to Luna. “I’m sorry that this happened, Luna. I want you to let me know if anything else of yours turns up missing.”

“You don’t have to...”

“It’s my job. You want me to do my job properly, don’t you?”

“Yes, Penelope.”

-

They went down to an uneventful breakfast, and then on to Double Defense Against the Dark Arts for their first lesson with Lockhart.

Harry didn't understand why Hermione's infatuation with the old fraud bugged him so much. He knew nothing would ever come of it, but he felt a small twinge of...something he couldn't define whenever she complimented the creep. Trying to avoid thinking about that, he wondered whether they'd have the same pixie lesson that Neville had had the day before.

"Good morning, class," Gilderoy announced cheerily, managing to show all of his perfect teeth. "Allow me to introduce you to your new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher – me, the Great Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third Class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award – but I don't talk about that. I didn't conquer the Yeti by smiling at it!"

He waited for them to laugh; only a few people, Hermione included, did. He then began handing out test papers and said, "You have thirty minutes – start – now!"

Harry looked down at his paper, and realized that it was indeed the same test that Neville had taken when he read the first question.

1. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite color?

He did remember what Hermione had said the day before, but he wasn't going to answer these stupid questions the way Lockhart wanted. Dipping his quill in a bottle of ink, he wrote, '*Gold – like a Galleon.*'

2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?

Harry answered, '*To make tons of Galleons by forcing hundreds of students to buy all his worthless books by being their teacher.*'

3. What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?

'Achieving the lowest O.W.L. scores for the last 500 years – the lowest ever for a Slytherin.'

On and on it went, over three sides of paper, right down to:

54. When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

'Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday was one of the saddest days in our history, and his ideal gift would be yet another picture of himself to add to his collection, but he wouldn't say no to a bag of gold.'

While Lockhart was flipping through the papers, Harry noticed his eyes bulge out as he looked at what Harry thought was his own test paper. He quickly moved it to the bottom of the stack and started complimenting Hermione's answers, causing her to blush much to Harry's irritation.

-

"So," said Harry after they left the class, which did not include the pixies, "what did Professor Lockhart teach us in class today, Hermione? Besides how red you can get when a teacher you fancy compliments you."

She stopped dead in her tracks as all her blood rushed to her cheeks. "I do NOT fancy him," she declared. "And as for our lesson," her brow furrowed, showing Harry that she was deep in thought. "Er, he...he was just trying to, to break the ice. He wanted us to get to know each other better. I'm sure that our next lesson will be much more...informative." Harry was truly getting sick of the way Hermione was defending that bloke, and he currently wasn't sure she wouldn't turn him in for pranking Lockhart. He decided that, for the first time in his Hogwarts career, he was going to have to do something behind Hermione's back.

-

"So what did you want,"

"to talk about?" asked the Weasley twins. Harry had sent them a note with Hedwig to meet him.

"I think Lockhart's a fraud, and I want to prove it. I figure that we should prank him in such a way that a wizard of his supposed skill

should be able to avoid, but instead he'll have to ask for help undoing the jinxes."

"Sounds like a..." said George.

"Worthy cause," completed Fred.

Together, they sacredly said, "To insure the competence of the staff – every student's responsibility."

"We are surprised..."

"That Hermione's not here."

"Nor Padma."

Harry's ears turned slightly pink. "Well, Hermione fancies the ponce, er, like most of the girls I guess, and I don't know how Padma feels about him. I don't want to risk either of them interfering."

Both Fred and George smiled at each other. "We understand, now."

"He's a rival for Hermione's affections."

Harry's face turned red. "He's not! I'm not after Hermione's...er, affections. I'm just concerned about her. That's all!"

"Of course." Fred winked at him.

"We believe you." Now George winked.

"Look, are you in or out?"

-

The next morning, while the Gryffindor Quidditch team was having an early practice, and allowing a first-year to try out to become the youngest Seeker in a century (due to how poorly their previous Seeker had performed), Lockhart was nervously opening the door to Hagrid's old hut. He'd been ordered by the Headmistress to inspect it for any hazards, and warned that she didn't know what kinds of dark creatures the half-giant who'd previously inhabited it kept as pets.

She'd also said that her nephew would be among those who used it, and if anything dangerous was still in there after Lockhart said it was fine, he'd be in serious trouble. He didn't know that the Headmistress was following him, disillusioned.

"He wouldn't have had anything dangerous," Lockhart said to himself shakily. "I'll just go in there and nothing will attack me, and then I'll certify it as safe."

Minerva had a hard time not chuckling when she thought of the creatures she'd put in there while Matthew was handling her classes the last few days. She didn't consider it wrong to give the Assistant Professor extra experience. In fact, from what she'd heard, he'd done an excellent job.

The DADA Professor opened the door to find the room full of people. Not just any people, he realized with horror. They were people he'd interviewed and obliterated for his books, and they looked mad.

"LOCKHART, YOU FRAUD!!!" one of them shouted. "You said you'd make me famous! Instead, once I told you my story, you erased my memory!"

While others made similar claims, Minerva stood there shocked. She'd suspected he'd made up the stories in his books – not that he'd stolen the stories in such a cruel way. She unfortunately knew that a person's boggart can't be considered evidence. Gilderoy could claim that it's his fear that others will falsely claim he'd done that, but she knew the truth. Just as she was beginning to wonder if he'd ever catch on, Lockhart began to stutter.

"Wh,wh,wh, wait a minute. You're dead." He was pointing at an old man. "Y-you'd be older now." He was looking at a girl. This has got to be...what were they called?" he said as he absently moved his wand. "This is so ridiculous!" Suddenly, all of the faces had blank expressions like they'd just lost their memories. Lockhart then began to laugh cruelly at them, and the boggart was banished. He then looked around to make sure no one had seen, not noticing the slight distortion. Minerva smiled as she noticed a wet spot in the front of his robes. She saw him notice that and mutter, "I wish I knew a drying spell. Is this stupid job worth this? Maybe I should..."

Minerva quickly made herself visible and shouted happily from behind Lockhart. "Oh, Gilderoy. I see you're about to inspect the house. Would you care for some help?"

He stiffened for a moment before saying (without turning around), "N-No that's perfectly alright. I have everything under control here." She stayed until he actually stepped inside and started walking away, making the door close without him seeing her do it. She then disillusioned herself again to watch more.

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Gilderoy had looked over his shoulder to see Minerva walk away, having planned to immediately leave when suddenly the door slammed. He tried opening it unsuccessfully, and realized he was trapped. That's when all Hell broke loose. He heard a fluttering of wings above him, and looked up to see about fifty winged keys that suddenly turned on him. He dropped to the floor in fright and tried to crawl under the bed for cover while his clothes, hands, and head were cut up by his attackers. He was doing his best to keep his hands over his face as he shimmied along.

When he got under the bed, he placed his left hand in a yellowish liquid that smelled of petrol. He suddenly found himself in tremendous pain and jumped back out while screaming in agony. He didn't know it, but he'd put his hand in a puddle of bubotuber puss. The keys continued their attack as he ran to the curtains, intent on wiping the puss from his hand on them. When he did, a swarm of fairy-like creatures covered in black hair flew out of the curtains at him. He didn't know what they were, but he soon found out that they had sharp, venomous teeth when one got his neck.

By this time, his clothes were torn up; his face, hands, and neck were bleeding; his hair was disheveled; and he was crying. Soon, the doxies from the curtains began biting his hair off. He screamed even more as he fell to the ground and assumed the fetal position.

-

Minerva felt he'd had enough (she didn't want to kill him, after all – that would be too much parchmentwork), so she sent a Patronus

(which was quite easy to produce under the circumstances) to a few of her colleagues to summon them there. Since they'd been waiting for the sign, they were there within five minutes when Minerva gently opened the door to reveal Lockhart still in that position crying as keys and doxies continually attacked him. Flitwick, Sprout, Sinistra, and Kettleburn (the four heads of house), along with Madam Pomfrey, all looked on in amusement. He hadn't noticed them. Flitwick pulled out his wand and performed a few charms. Within seconds, the attackers were on the ground, frozen stiff.

Minerva walked up to the weeping Defense teacher and cleared her throat. He looked up at her and muttered, "Is it over?" before his eyes widened to see the others there as well. With what little dignity he had, he got up and tried adjusting the rags he was wearing. "You shouldn't have interfered," he said confidently, "I had them right where I wanted them."

"Really?" asked Minerva with a smirk.

"Oh, yes. You see, I wanted to pretend, er, for the sake of my classes. You see, I wanted to try and learn what it's like to be a victim. You see, a man of my talent has never really had anything to fear. Therefore, I refrained from defending myself. Unfortunately, since I knew the whole time that I was in no real danger, I didn't experience what I was hoping for – fear."

Minerva could almost smell the manure Lockhart's story was filling the cabin with as Madam Pomfrey began healing his wounds without a word.

Sprout said, "Then perhaps you would care to assist me in eliminating the infestation of garden gnomes that have made their way into one of the classrooms. We'll just throw them out the window. They shouldn't be able to return. The room is on the fifth floor."

He smiled charmingly at her, glad he hadn't lost any teeth, and said, "I'd love to assist you, Pomona, but unfortunately, I'll be busily grading homework for the next few weeks."

"I see," she responded.

-

After Flitwick left, Minerva quickly took care of any threats in that room and asked Harry, Hermione and Padma to come to her office, where she showed them the memory of what had happened at Hagrid's old hut. Hermione looked more distressed than Harry had ever seen her.

"B-but he...he wrote...how could he? He lied. Not only that, but it looks like he erased their memories. How could he? And he laughed, laughed at them." Her face turned hard and unforgiving. "He got what he deserved! You shouldn't have helped him!"

"Miss Granger, Hermione," said Minerva. "I agree that his behavior is abominable, but I couldn't just let him die." She took a deep breath. "Unfortunately, there is no evidence of what he's done." She then looked at the three kids with a smirk. "However, if for some reason he didn't like it here and decided to quit, that would be another story."

Harry looked around at the two girls, and could tell by their expressions that he could now count them in on the plans he and the Weasley twins were making. "That would be so...unfortunate," he said, not bothering to hide the sarcasm.

"Anyway," said Minerva, "the hut has been cleared of anything dangerous. You may now take possession of it. I suggest you ask the house elves for assistance. I've already authorized them to give you any spare furniture in the castle and any other assistance you may need."

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Later that afternoon, Hermione was reluctant at first to take Professor McGonagall's suggestion about using the elves until Harry asked her this question:

"Are you going to pick up Hagrid's bed and get it out of here?"

Her ears turned pink as Padma giggled.

“Er, no, I suppose not. It’s not like it’s hard for them to do something like this. It shouldn’t do any harm.”

“And remember,” said Padma, “We’re not trying to put them out of work right now – just stop the abuse. They should actually be happy to help make this into our office.”

-

With the help of a few elves, who were only too honored to help, all of the giant-sized furniture was eliminated within five minutes of that conversation. Some bookshelves, two normal-sized tables, fifteen chairs and a trunk with a very sturdy lock were brought in. Harry set his boom box on one of the bookshelves, and they listened to music while they worked. When the place was set up properly, with ten C.A.R.E.-related books on it, Harry started playing on his Game Boy while Padma was reading one of the books and Hermione was composing a list of other books to get. While they were still doing that, there was a knock at the door. Hermione opened it.

“Hello, Professor McGonagall,” she said.

Harry paused his game and looked up, grinning at his favorite aunt. “Hi. What do you think?”

“The place certainly seems roomier without Hagrid-sized furniture in it. I am curious why you have two tables here.”

“That’s so that we’ll have room for more people to work if we have a project or study groups,” said Hermione.

“Or if we have lunch here,” added Padma with a grin. Each table had six chairs with it, with the three remaining chairs in different corners.

“Well, you’ve certainly done a good job with it.” She then got her wand from its holster and performed a spell on the door handle. “I’ve transfigured this lock to be much more secure,” she said before pulling three keys out of her pocket. “I’ve already made these for you. I’ve done something special with these keys so that a simple duplicating charm won’t make a key that works on the door. Come to

me if you need any more copies.” She then handed one to each of them.

“What did you do to them?” asked Hermione curiously.

Minerva smiled inwardly at how eagerly the girl sought knowledge. She was the quintessential Ravenclaw. However, she’d already made her decision regarding the key. “That’s for me to know and you to find out. I don’t want a thousand copies of that key floating around, and I think that this is a good way to keep track of it. Perhaps one day I will show you, but not for a couple years.”

“Yes, Professor,” Hermione said quickly.

“Very well. Enjoy your day, all three of you.”

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The trio soon left Hagrid’s hut after Harry locked his boom box and Game Boy in the trunk (that he also had a key to). They then revised for a few hours, and then Harry decided to call his family. Hermione mentioned that she was going to do the same thing.

“Hi, Brianna.”

“Hey, Harry,” she said, smiling at her brother.

“How are things at home?”

“Great. They’re making Lightfellow retire from baseball. They made him fake an injury to stop him from playing until his trial. He’s going to have the hearing next month, and I’ve been asked to testify at it. I got the letter yesterday. If somehow he gets off, then he’ll say that he recovered. If, as is expected, he gets convicted, his ‘injury’ will be so great he can’t play again. He might even get jail time.”

“I’m surprised they need you to testify.”

“I think they just want as many witnesses as they can get. Did you get you and Hermione’s love-shack ready yet?”

Harry's ears turned bright red, but he managed to keep a straight face. "Perhaps you have a love-shack you share with Bobby, but the C.A.R.E. headquarters is ready, if that's what you mean. Aunt Minnie liked it. She had us watch her memory of that idiot Lockhart trying to inspect the place. The doxies would've killed him. Of course, Hermione was devastated watching it. Especially his boggart."

"What's a boggart?" asked Brianna.

Harry explained what they are, and what Lockhart's said to him, and then the rest of what happened. Finally, he said, "Can you get me mom and dad, or do I need to hang up on you and call them?"

-

The next day, Harry and Hermione got up early to go to the Quidditch tryouts. Harry brought his broom along. They'd planned on sharing it that day. The captain of the team, a seventh-year girl named Michelle Hamilton, had posted it a few days before.

They arrived at the pitch to see a small crowd of about thirty people sitting on the stands. Facing them was a very attractive girl with long, curly red hair and a very nice figure. She was wearing a light blue t-shirt and jeans under her open school robe that showed a Quidditch Captain badge. She was floating on a broom held onto by just her legs, and holding a muggle clipboard and a pen. He figured that she was muggle-born that had realized how inconvenient quills and ink were. Her brows were furrowed with thought in a way that Harry thought was very cute. He was staring open-mouthed at her.

"If you'll put your eyes back in your head," said Hermione irritably, "we should take a seat."

He was brought out of his stupor by this. "I wasn't..." he said defensively as his ears turned pink. Hermione never got to hear what Harry wasn't doing, because at that moment, Michelle began to speak. They quickly sat next to Cho Chang.

"Hello, everyone. Thanks for coming. For those of you who don't know, Ravenclaw has both a regular and reserve Quidditch team. So far, we're the only Hogwarts team that does, but doing the smart thing

is part of being a Ravenclaw. Am I right?" She asked the last question enthusiastically, and earned a few yells of ascent and clapping. Smiling in a way that, for some unexplained reason, made Harry's stomach feel funny, she continued her speech.

"Although some of you were on the team last year and performed admirably, I'm still requiring everyone to try out. I want to make sure we have the best possible team, so every position, except mine as one of the starting Chasers, is open right now. I'll apologize in advance if I hurt anybody's feelings by rejecting them, but I want to win the Quidditch Cup this year. I'm not trying to be mean and it's not personal." She took a deep breath. "First of all, I'd like to make sure that everyone here can at least fly properly."

She had half of the hopefuls, Harry included, fly around the pitch while the other half watched. She eliminated five of them who seemed to wobbling along on their broomsticks, acting as though this was their first time flying. Harry landed beside Hermione. "Here you go," he said smiling, handing her his broom so she could fly with the second group of fifteen. "I know you don't need luck to get past this part." Hermione would never admit it, but she was glad that Cho Chang was part of her group, and wasn't sitting next to Harry.

After four others were eliminated, Hermione returned to Harry's side to find him gazing at the Captain. "Harry," she said with a smirk, "Isn't Michelle pretty?"

"Yeah...I mean, I suppose she's alright. Bit too old for my taste, of course." Hermione was giggling as Harry's face turned red. She'd thought about Harry's apparent crush on Ms. Hamilton while she was flying, and realized that Harry would no more go after her than she would've gone after Lockhart before watching the Pensieve. She also knew that Michelle would be gone the next year, and probably had a boyfriend – if not a fiancé. So, therefore, she decided that the best solution to the problem was to tease Harry mercilessly about it.

"Alright," said Michelle. "Now we're going to have tryouts for positions. We'll start with Chasers, because we'll need them to test Beaters and Keepers. The last position will be Seeker." She looked around at the crowd. "I hope there's a good one out there, because I've heard the

Gryffindor's got a new Seeker, who they consider their secret-weapon. I don't know anything else about this person."

The tryouts went all morning, with Hermione using the broom more than Harry. She was kept in the mix with six others when the Beaters started hitting Bludgers at them. One of the Beater-wanna-be's was so bad that he almost hit Harry, who was patiently sitting in the stands. Finally, the people trying out for Keeper were brought in, and six of the Chasers were separated into two teams, and had to try to score goals while the Beaters were going at them. It was a regular game minus the Seeker – the only difference being that timeouts and replacements happened a lot more often as Michelle was narrowing down her choices. Hermione scored a few goals, but a few others scored more. Once, she was hit with a Bludger, but managed to pass the Quaffle just before the impact, and did stay on the broom. When the mock-game was declared over by the Captain, who'd been taking notes the whole time, Hermione flew down next to Harry.

"Thanks for letting me borrow your broom. Good luck." She seemed to Harry as though she'd decided that she didn't make the team and was trying to accept it.

"You did a good job out there, Hermione," he said, earnestly.

"There were better Chasers out there, not to mention Michelle..."

"Who hasn't announced who's made the team yet. Maybe you have and maybe you haven't. We'll deal with that, later. Either way, you still did good out there. I was proud of you." Her ears turned pink as Harry mounted his broom. "I've got to get out there."

As it turned out, only one other person was trying out for the Seeker position, which pretty much guaranteed that he'd at least be a reserve. The Captain was going to release the Snitch, and whoever caught it would be the starting Seeker. That would change if the other showed more skill during practices. Everyone else was allowed to leave if they wanted. Hermione stayed. Harry looked at his competitor, Cho Chang, and grinned. They were friends, and she was a member of C.A.R.E., so this wasn't a grudge match. He said, "May the best man win."

She stuck her tongue out. "I'm sure she will."

After fifteen minutes, Harry was getting bored as he scanned the pitch, with Cho marking him. He knew they'd missed lunch, and planned to visit the kitchen once this was over. He hadn't caught sight of the Snitch, and obviously Chang hadn't either. He decided to add some excitement. He looked straight at the ground, gave a look of enthusiasm, and flew straight toward the ground. Cho followed.

He got closer and closer to the earth, gaining speed the whole way. When he was four feet away from crashing, he pulled on his Lightning Bolt, going level with his feet touching the blades of grass. He heard a small thud behind him, and then Cho's angry voice shouting, "I'll get you for that, McGonagall!" so he knew she was alright. He rose up in the air and scanned the pitch again. He saw that his competitor was in the air again by the time he was back where he'd started. He kept looking around, and just as Chang got about level with him, he saw that the Snitch had actually gone where he'd dived to before. He started diving back down immediately, not even hearing Cho shout, "Do you honestly think you can fool me again?"

He was half-way to the Snitch when he saw it starting to move away. He adjusted his course to follow it, and heard a swear word coming from his competitor just before his fist wrapped around the tiny winged ball. She was still fifteen feet from him.

Michelle flew up to him, beaming. "Congratulations, McGonagall! That was some great flying. You'll be our starting Seeker."

"Er, thanks," he said, blushing. He then turned his broom to fly over to Cho, who appeared unhappy. "I'm sorry about that feint, Cho. I hope you didn't get hurt."

Not looking very happy, but not angry either, she said, "Don't worry about it, Harry. You out-flew me. You really are good."

"Thanks," he said, before flying down toward Hermione.

"Harry, I thought I was going to die when you did that dive! What were you thinking? Don't ever do that again!"

He chuckled at her response. With a completely insincere expression on his face, he answered, "Yes, mom."

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After sneaking to the kitchens for a late lunch, they went to library to do some revision. They had the first meeting for the year of their study group in about a half-hour.

"Oh look," said Hermione, "There's Ginny Weasley." He looked and saw her sitting alone at a table. She did look very excited as she wrote into what appeared to be the same book she'd had on the train. Harry imagined that it was probably her diary.

"She looks happy," he commented.

"Why don't we go talk to her?" asked Hermione.

Shrugging his shoulders, he agreed and they went up to her.

"Hello, Ginny," said Hermione.

The girl stopped writing immediately and closed her book. "Hi, Hermione, Harry."

"Er," said Harry, "We just wanted to ask how your first week has gone."

"Oh, really well. I'm..." She frowned for a moment and then her expression became neutral. "Well, I'm doing good. Don't forget out bet."

He smiled. "I won't when it's time for me to collect. I just made the team."

Her eyes widened. "Y-you made it. Weren't you trying out for Seeker?"

He nodded. "Yes, so now I'll personally make sure we win."

The redhead turned to Hermione. "Did you make the team, too?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. The rest of the positions haven't been listed yet."

"But she did a great job during the tryout."

"Well, good luck."

"Thanks," said Hermione. "Listen, we're going to have our study group here in about fifteen minutes. You're welcome to join us."

"Thanks, but I wouldn't want to be the only first-year."

"You won't be," said Harry, "Luna's gonna be here."

"You'll be able to ask for help with anything you're having a problem with," said Hermione. "Just try it one time."

Ginny appeared deep in thought for a moment. "I suppose it won't hurt. Ron's not in the group, is he?"

"No," said Harry with a grin. He then turned to Hermione. "Why don't we move the group to headquarters once everyone's here?"

"I don't see any reason not to," said Hermione with a grin.

"Where's that?" asked Ginny.

"You'll see," said Harry. "We set it up yesterday."

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Half an hour later; Harry, Hermione, Padma, Anthony, Luna, Hannah, Susan, Neville and Ginny were sitting at the tables in headquarters, with soft music playing in the background. Harry had stopped by the kitchens to get a pitcher of pumpkin juice and some cups while the others made their way to the cabin. "Isn't this much better than the library," Harry said after drinking deeply from his glass.

"There aren't any garflets here," said Luna in agreement, "so we should be able to concentrate."

“Er, right,” said Harry. The others had already been warned not to comment on Luna’s remarks. “To start out, do you or Ginny have any specific problems with what you’ve been taught this week?”

The girls each had a few difficulties, although Luna explained hers in a much more colorful way than Ginny. After moving on from there, Hermione summarized what the younger girls needed to understand before going on to second year material, doing her best to make sure the girls weren’t lost. The most extra time that was spent helping the first-years was ten minutes, and Hermione felt that it would greatly benefit them to see where they were headed. Both Ginny and Luna said they’d meet with the group only once per week, since neither wanted to hold the second-years back. The study session ended at dinner time.

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When the Ravenclaws got back to their common room after dinner, they noticed that the Quidditch team was posted. Harry practically had to carry his best friend to the message board so she could find out the results of her tryout. She frowned when she saw that the starting Chasers were Michelle Hamilton (Captain, 7th Year), Roger Davies (4th Year) and Sean Bradley (3rd Year).

“I didn’t make it,” she said, sounding defeated.

“But you did make the reserves,” said Harry, pointing at her name on that list.

Her frown turned into a smile for a moment, and then wavered. “Do, do you think that my parents will still buy me a broom?”

“There’s only one way to find out,” he said, grinning. He was certain that her parents would still do it. She was a member of the team, after all.

“I suppose so,” she said, and went down to her dorm, presumably to mirror call her folks.

Even though Harry already knew his name would be on the list, it still felt good to read ‘*Harry McGonagall*’ as the starting Seeker. He was

still looking at the names when Hermione reappeared beside him. She was beaming ear to ear.

“They said YES!” she declared, hugging him.

He hugged her back, saying, “I knew they would. I told you that you did a good job. You wouldn’t believe me.”

She let go and smiled at him for a moment before looking back at the list. “It says here that practices begin next Saturday. I should have it by then.”

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The rest of the month went by swiftly after that, with the Weasley twins planning the prank on Lockhart with the Golden Trio. They had to make certain potions that required time to brew, so unfortunately, it wouldn’t be ready until October. A few minor pranks had been pulled on Gilderoy, but nothing of consequence. By Wednesday, Hermione had gotten a Nimbus 2001 from her parents, and was looking forward to trying it out at practice. On Friday, Harry could have sworn that Ginny Weasley received a wrapped broomstick with her mail, but didn’t say anything about it, although he did think that he’d done a better job of smuggling one in the year before. He was honestly surprised that no one caught her.

Ravenclaw practices went very well, and it soon became obvious that Hermione was the best reserve they had. Cho didn’t seem to be holding a grudge when she saw Harry at practices. The format of the practice sessions was for the Captain to speak for about five minutes about any problems or opportunities for improvement that she’d noticed, and then they’d have a full game of the starters versus the reserves, with Michelle interrupting any time she saw a problem. She wouldn’t waste practice time (where they had to reserve the pitch) talking strategy, especially because most strategies only involved one of the positions. She’d hand out scrolls to each player at the end of practice describing the strategies, and tell them to talk to her before the next practice if anything wasn’t clear. If she did feel that the team needed a speech, she’d do it in a corner of their common room.

Malfoy was mad that his punishment for the previous year still held, and he wasn't allowed to play Quidditch for Slytherin until his fourth year. Despite how the jerk bragged about his Quidditch abilities, Harry thought it was probably good for Slytherin that he wasn't allowed to play. He had no doubt that the idiot would find a way to buy his way onto the team, and be the worst player out there.

Harry threw a small birthday party for Hermione with their study group, only this time it was at Headquarters. He gave her a wrist wand holster like his own. His family, using the mirrors, wished her a happy birthday during the party as well. Before they knew it, October had arrived.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 16 – October Attacks

“Come...come to me....Let me rip you....Let me tear you....Let me kill you....”

“What?” exclaimed Harry as he gave a huge jump, looking at his companions with his pale face. The voice he’d just heard chilled him to the bone. It was a voice of breath-taking, ice-cold venom. Fred, George, Hermione, and Padma looked at him strangely. They were currently inside the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom preparing a prank on Lockhart. It was after curfew, and Padma was keeping an eye on the Marauder’s Map while the others performed spells and set up potions where they needed to be.

“What is it, Harry?” asked Hermione, looking concerned.

“Didn’t you hear it?” he asked.

“Hear what?” asked Fred.

“Is there a teacher coming?” asked George.

“No. It wasn’t a teacher. It said it wanted to kill.”

“Maybe it was Filch,” suggested George.

“Is he near here?” asked Fred, looking at Padma.

“No,” she answered, after double-checking. “No one’s near here. Your little sister’s wondering the corridors, though.”

Fred and George looked proud and solemn. “Little Ginny’s first time violating Hogwarts’ curfew.”

“She’s growing up.”

“Where’s she at?” asked Harry, curious.

“On the second floor,” said Padma. “Almost directly above us.”

“I wonder if she pranked Lockhart’s office,” commented Fred.

“That would be funny,” said Padma. “To be pranked twice in the same day.”

They all chuckled at that and continued working, and made their way to the Ravenclaw Tower, where Padma gave the twins their map back so they could make it to Gryffindor Tower.

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The next morning began normally, with the ‘golden trio’ eating breakfast together at the Ravenclaw table with Luna.

“I wonder if Aunt Minnie’ll be in class today,” said Harry.

“I hope it’s Professor Shapon, said Padma dreamily, reminding Harry of the crush his friend had on his aunt’s assistant.

“I hope it’s McGonagall,” countered Hermione. “I have an extra credit paper to hand in, and I wanted to speak to her about it.” Harry and Padma looked at Hermione like she’d grown a third eye while Luna was staring blankly in front of her while filling her mouth with scrambled eggs. “What?”

“Hermione,” said Harry gently, “You are at the top of the class, and we’re both over a month ahead in our assignments. You honestly don’t need extra credit.”

“I wanted to write that essay,” she said. “I took my notes about primates from the zoo and cross-referenced it with information from a *Guide to Advanced Transfiguration* that I borrowed from the library...”

“That’s the N.E.W.T. Transfiguration book,” interrupted Padma.

“Exactly,” said Hermione, sounding slightly irritated at being interrupted. “The point is that I wrote a comparative analysis about the difficulties of transfiguring various different primates into water goblets.”

“I wonder if I should write a paper on transfiguring Crumple-Horned Snorkacks into Nargles,” commented Luna dreamily as she put down her fork. “I understand that it is quite difficult,” she added.

Harry controlled his expression to stop himself from smiling, and made sure he didn't meet anyone else's eyes, knowing he'd burst out laughing at the thought of the look on his aunt's face when she reads the title of Luna's essay. His ears had become pink from his efforts. He cleared his throat. "If I were you, Luna, I'd wait on doing any extra credit until I need it. I believe you told us you were getting E's and O's on all your transfiguration papers."

"Yes, I have," the blonde girl said, "although certain comments I'd made comparing turning a mouse into a stone to turning a triple-legged vratch into one were crossed out on my last parchment. I don't think Professor McGonagall has heard of them."

"Really," said Padma, sounding sarcastic, earning a quick glare from Harry.

"Then maybe you shouldn't mention the creatures the Professor hasn't heard of on your assignments," said Hermione.

For the first time in Harry's memory, Luna looked sad for a moment. "I suppose I'll have to. I wouldn't want Professor McGonagall to believe that I think I'm smarter than her just because I know about vratches. It might make her feel bad." Her eyes brightened for a moment. "I should also get her a subscription to the Quibbler so that she'll learn about them."

"Now that that's settled," said Harry with a grin, "I think we should be off to our first class."

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Harry's first class was Transfiguration with the Gryffindors, and his aunt was present, so Hermione stayed after class to hand in her extra credit. Harry handed in the summary of one of the Animagus book chapters as well. After that, they had Herbology with the Slytherins, who had been much more subdued without Snape to favor them, although nothing could stop Malfoy from starting trouble.

Immediately after class, Draco, flanked by his bodyguards, approached Harry, sneering. "Hey, McGonagall, I heard your aunt is taking a *personal* interest in Lockhart. They were together near your

precious care shack a few weeks ago. Maybe he'll be your *uncle* soon." Crabbe and Goyle sniggered as though he'd said something very funny.

Harry's hands closed into fists automatically. His face was turning red. "She can't stand that ponce," he said as calmly as he could while glaring at Draco. If he'd looked to his left or right, he'd have seen the concerned expressions that his friends were shooting his way.

Draco continued, "Of course, I don't know how Lockhart can stand someone as old and..."

"New sparks," muttered Harry, calling his wand to his right hand.

"Harry, no!" said Hermione, causing Draco to stop in mid-sentence. He stuck his nose in the air, sniffing around, with an expression on his face like he'd smelled something awful.

"I knew I smelled a disgusting mudblood, Granger," he said, causing Dumb and Dumber to laugh once again. "Maybe you should go back in there and beg Sprout to give you some dragon dung to use as perfume. It would make you smell much better."

At the same time, Padma was whispering the incantation for a spell the Weasley twins had taught them, while taking advantage of the fact that the three stooges were all looking at Hermione. "***Nidor sicut fimus***," she said while aiming her wand at Draco's midsection. She quickly put it away.

"Isn't it strange," commented Harry, who'd noticed Padma's actions, in a scientific tone of voice, "how inbreeding causes problems with the subject's senses, such as smell."

"Indeed," agreed Hermione in a haughty voice.

"They smell themselves," continued Harry, "and believe it was someone five feet from them. Let's go."

As the Ravenclaw trio was leaving, the Slytherins were just noticing a horrid smell coming from Draco. "Ewww, Draco," muttered Crabbe

(the first words Harry had ever heard him speak) I think you went in your pants."

"I did n..." yelled Draco as an expression of comprehension dawned on his face. "It was them!" He pulled out his wand, aiming for Harry's back.

"Accio, Malfoy's left shoe," Harry muttered. He'd just been waiting for Draco to catch on. His left foot kicked up of its own accord, knocking him off balance. Harry stopped his spell so the arrogant fool could spectacularly fall on his backside, dropping his wand in the process. It rolled about ten feet away.

Harry and his friends kept walking while Draco shouted, "Help me up, you idiots!"

Goyle started to bend toward him, but stopped, saying, "Sorry, Draco. I just can't stand the smell." By this time, a small crowd had gathered to watch the show. They were all commenting on how repulsive Malfoy smelled.

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During lunch, one of the Weasley twins winked at Harry from the Gryffindor table, thus assuring him that the house elves had agreed to add something special to Lockhart's and another student's meal. Harry had a feeling that his aunt had instructed the elves to obey any instructions from them to prank Lockhart. It was the only reason they'd go along with it that made sense to the Boy-Who-Lived. He couldn't wait for lunch to be over so they could get to class. This was the first time he'd looked forward to one of Lockhart's lectures. The second year Ravensclaws and Hufflepuffs were going to get a good show.

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"Good afternoon, class," Lockhart said with a toothy grin. He was wearing his lilac outfit that he loved so much, and Harry was glad that the clown was wearing his favorite clothes. Using his old wand, Harry inconspicuously began the prank. "It's show time," he whispered

while Lockhart was doing a demonstration with that day's victim. This password began the sequence of events.

"Now class, when I, the brave Gilderoy Lockhart, was facing those twenty ghouls, did I show fear? No," he declared as he made Justin Finch-Fletchley come to the front of the class and raise his hands threateningly while pretending to be a ghoul. "I simply...ahhh Fire!" He'd noticed that a copy of *Magical Me* that had been on his desk was now in flames. What he didn't know was that this fire was releasing a chemical in the air that worked with the potion the fraud had ingested, and would produce a result in less than five minutes.

Lockhart, in a panicked state, ran close to the precious tome, and pointed his wand at it. "Aqua-mint!" he said confidently, causing nothing. He tried again, and a small white object that was shaped like a tear appeared in front of his wand and fell to the floor without a sound. By this time, the desk had caught fire.

Hermione pointed her wand at the desk and said, "Aguamenti," causing a stream of water to shoot from her wand, directly to the burning book, putting out the fire. It was at that moment that Lockhart had breathed in enough of the chemical.

Lockhart nervously said to his class, "Just a little, er, pop quiz, to see if..." He stopped speaking, because he no longer could. He'd transformed into a peacock.

Justin, who was still at the front of the class, touched Gilderoy's head, saying, "Profess..." He stopped speaking, because he noticed that another Hufflepuff – Ernie Macmillan – had changed form as well, only his form was not a peacock.

The arrogant Hufflepuff was now fourteen feet tall, full of white fur, with long claws and fangs. Anyone who'd looked at the covers of Lockhart's books instantly recognized that their classmate had been turned into a Yeti.

The peacock disappeared, replaced once again by Professor Lockhart. He smiled for a moment, until he noticed the Abominable Snowman standing in his classroom. His face paled as he shouted, "It's a Yeti! Run for your lives!" as he bolted for the door. Ernie,

however hadn't even moved yet. The moment Lockhart's hand touched the doorknob, a huge, foot-wide, yellow streak of paint appeared down the middle of his whole body – on his hair, face, and clothes. However, the Order of Merlin recipient was so scared he didn't notice as he wrenched the door open and ran. The whole class erupted in laughter. Ernie returned to normal before the mirth had died down.

"So you see," said Harry when he'd stopped chuckling, "the actual way that Gilderoy Lockhart the Brave handles a Yeti is by running for it, leaving a room full of kids behind to save themselves."

"Maybe he's getting specialized equipment," suggested one of the Hufflepuff girls.

At that moment, an elderly wizard with short gray hair and a well-trimmed beard that looked rather strong that Harry recognized as one of the teachers, but did not know his name, ran into the room, wand brandished. "Where is the Yeti?" he demanded in his scratchy voice.

"It's gone," said Padma with a straight face. "Apparently someone thought it was funny to turn Ernie into one for a few seconds." The smart Patil twin acted like she had been annoyed with whoever the culprit was. Harry was impressed with her acting skills.

The tough-looking old man showed a hint of a smile. "Hm. Professor Lockhart came running down the hallway screaming about a Yeti being loose in the castle. By the looks of things, he's been branded a coward with the largest yellow streak that I've ever seen. I last saw him going down the stairs, probably headed outside. I'd say that your class is dismissed."

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Harry was disappointed to see that Lockhart had shown up for dinner (in a different outfit). Apparently Professor Grubbly had caught him running away and stopped him, lecturing him on cowardice until someone from the castle informed them that it was a false alarm.

Over the rest of the week, Harry got more and more nervous as Michelle called for practice every other day in preparation for the

upcoming Quidditch match between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Harry was sure that he could play, but he'd never played in front of a huge crowd before. A lot of things could happen during the game.

He found himself staring at his empty plate at breakfast time, feeling butterflies fighting a war in his stomach, sitting with his friends.

"Harry," said Hermione, "you've got to eat something."

"Yeah," agreed Padma. "or you'll be too busy looking for food to notice the Snitch."

"I'm not hungry," insisted Harry for the third time that morning. Looking for a way to steer the conversation away from his appetite, he looked at the head table. "Who's that guy sitting with Professor Grubbly?"

"I don't know," said Hermione with a grin after looking where Harry indicated, "but he does seem awfully friendly with her. He's probably here to watch the match."

"You have to eat, Harry," came a female voice from behind him. Harry turned around to see his captain, Michelle Hamilton, looking just as pretty as ever, smiling at him. Harry swallowed as he felt himself blush.

"Alright," he said, and grabbed a slice of toast and obediently took a bite, accidentally knocking over his glass of pumpkin juice with his elbow in the process. He quietly swore before grabbing a napkin to clean up after himself while Padma giggled and Hermione covered her mouth. Harry briefly contemplated the benefits of hiding under the table.

"Good," Michelle said, trying to hide her mirth. "Try not to be too nervous out there." She turned to Harry's best friend. "Hermione, don't forget that you'll have to change into uniform as well. I want all my reserves ready to fly into the game at a moment's notice."

"Of course, Michelle," she replied, still doing her best not to laugh at her friend.

As the Ravenclaw captain was walking away, Harry said, "Go ahead, laugh. I know you want to anyway." They enthusiastically obeyed.

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Less than an hour later, Harry was walking out of the changing rooms wearing his blue and silver Quidditch robes and carrying his Lightning Bolt. He saw that Hermione was already waiting for him, holding her Nimbus 2001.

"There you are," said Hermione.

"Here I am," agreed Harry with a smirk.

"I just wanted to wish you good luck. You're playing against a fourth-year named Cedric Diggory. He's supposed to be a really good Seeker."

"Thanks for the words of encouragement," said Harry sarcastically. She opened her mouth to speak, but he put his hand up. "Don't worry. I was only kidding."

"I'm sure you'll get the Snitch," said Hermione looking into his eyes.

"Thanks."

At that moment, Michelle walked up to them. "Good. You're dressed. It's about time for the game to start. Remember, Harry, pay attention to the Snitch and any Bludgers that come your way. That's your job. Don't worry about the Quaffle or the hoops..."

"Or the hundreds of people watching," said Harry with a smirk.

"Just catch the Snitch before Diggory does. He's bigger than you, so you have the size advantage, but don't underestimate him."

"I won't," promised Harry.

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"Welcome to the first game of the Quidditch season this year!" boomed the voice of Gryffindor fourth-year Lee Jordan. "For this

game, it's Hufflepuff versus Ravenclaw!" First he introduced the Hufflepuff team, who flew in wearing their gold uniforms, followed by the Ravenclaws, starting with, "The lovely Michelle Hamilton. Sorry, Professor." As Harry flew in, he heard Lee say, "And finally, Ravenclaw's new Seeker, making his debut this game, is Harry McGonagall!" Half the crowd cheered, causing Harry to smile. "I hope he does better than the last Seeker Ravenclaw had. Sorry, Professor McGonagall."

The captains shook hands and Madam Hooch released the enchanted balls. Harry watched the Snitch for about five seconds before it disappeared. Finally, she threw the Quaffle into the air, and it was immediately grabbed by Michelle, who made her way toward the hoops.

Harry, obeying his captain, flew up above the action, systematically scanning the pitch for a glint of gold. He noticed that the opposing Seeker was doing the same thing. He flew close to Harry and called out, "Hi. I'm Cedric Diggory."

Taking a quick glance at Cedric before turning his attention back to the pitch, he responded, "Harry McGonagall."

At that moment, they both heard Jordan shout, "Hamilton scores! That's ten points for Ravenclaw!"

Harry cheered while Cedric frowned. "I'd better go to the other side of the pitch," he said, before leaving Harry.

The game went on for about fifteen minutes, with no sign of the Snitch. The score was forty-thirty, in favor of Hufflepuff. Harry was getting bored, and he noticed that Cedric was watching him. He decided to make the game a bit more interesting at the same time that Lee announced that the two teams were now tied. He picked a spot near the ground and aimed his Lightning Bolt at it, and pushed his broom to the limit.

"It looks like McGonagall has seen the Snitch, and is taking a dive for it. Diggory has also noticed, and is in hot pursuit. Both are getting closer and closer to the ground. It looks like they might crash. McGonagall pulls up about a foot from the ground. It was a feint!

Diggory just avoids crashing. In fact, it looks like his broom tapped the ground as he pulled up. It's a bit wobbly. McGonagall has returned to the same place he started, and Diggory looks mad."

Harry smirked at the older Seeker, who was glaring at him. Cedric had by now gotten control of his broom. Suddenly, Harry saw a glint of gold directly between them. He didn't wait to see if his opponent had noticed it. He took off at top speed, knowing he was risking a collision.

Harry grinned as he noticed the winged ball move toward him, but then, it increased its speed, which seemed rather strange. Cedric was about ten feet behind it, but closing fast. Harry reached out his hand to catch the Snitch, but it moved away from his hand and did something he'd never heard of happening. Moving faster than Harry's broom, the tiny ball hit him in the mouth. It felt like he'd been punched by someone twice his size. He felt a tooth fall from its place as he lost his balance and began to fall. With his right hand, he grabbed the Snitch, holding it tightly.

"McGonagall's got the Snitch! Ravenclaw wins! One hundred ninety to forty!"

With his left, he grabbed for his broom, brushing the ends of his fingers against it, but not getting it. He began to plummet toward the ground.

"Oh no. He's fallen from his broom."

'I'm gonna die,' Harry thought as he fell, until someone grabbed his left hand with two hands. He felt himself slow down and then stop as he heard a small grunt. He looked up to see that Michelle was upside down, hanging onto her broom with just her legs because both of her hands were holding his left tightly. He could also see that she was struggling.

"Hamilton has caught McGonagall!" The crowd cheered, but Harry knew that both he and Michelle were in danger.

"May I offer my assistance?" asked Cedric, as he put Harry's broom under him.

When he'd gotten on it properly, Harry said, "Thanks, Cedric," and then turned to face his captain, who was now right-side-up. "Thanks a lot, Michelle. You could've been killed."

She smiled at him. "I didn't want to lose my star Seeker." She then kissed his cheek, causing his face to turn as red as the blood coming from his mouth. "Come on. Let's get you down so Madam Pomfrey can help you."

"Oh, Harry! Are you alright? You're bleeding!" said Hermione without a breath as they landed. She engulfed him in a hug.

"Not to worry. Not to panic," said Lockhart as he walked up. "I can get you a new tooth in a moment." He pulled out his wand, only to have it fly out of his hand into the hand of a fierce-looking Professor McGonagall, who was pointing her wand at Gilderoy as she approached.

"Professor Lockhart," she said sternly, and Harry realized what a scare his aunt had been through. She was actually slightly panting as though she'd run a mile. He then realized that he was panting as well. "You are not a certified healer. Madam Pomfrey will take care of my nephew. Thank you very much. You may go."

"Very well, Headmistress," he said, recovering himself. "I can see that this has been quite a shock for you. May I have my wand back?"

She held it out toward him as she said sternly, "You are not to practice healing in this school. That's Madam Pomfrey's job." As soon as Lockhart was walking away, she turned to her nephew, hugging him tightly. "Are you alright, Harry? I almost died watching that."

"I'm fine, except I'm missing a tooth," he replied.

"I'll take him to see Poppy," said Minerva to Hermione and the rest of the team. "You get back to your Common Room where I'm sure a party is about to start. You can save him some butterbeer." When they seemed hesitant, she added. "You know that she'll kick you out immediately. I'm sure he'll be healed in a heartbeat." She pointed her wand toward the pitch and summoned Harry's tooth.

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After he'd gotten to the hospital wing, Madam Pomfrey determined that in addition to his broken tooth, his left arm was slightly strained. She healed him quickly, repairing and refastening the tooth, and giving him instructions to not do any heavy lifting with his left arm. She also healed his swollen lip. He left the hospital wing alone and began happily making his way up the stairs.

"Let me rip you! Let me taste you! Let me eat you!" he heard, seemingly coming out of the walls, after climbing one set of stairs. With no one else around, he decided to follow that voice, so he ran down the hallway, determined to figure out what was causing that voice.

It wasn't long until he ran across a strange sight. The first thing he noticed was Mr. Filch lying face-up and completely still on the floor with the back of his head in a puddle of water. A mop was held tightly in his hands. From around the corner, he heard a growl and turned to see a dust colored cat with lamp-like yellow eyes and a skeletal build that he quickly identified as Mrs. Norris running toward him. He summoned his wand into his right hand for protection.

"Mizter McGonagall!" shouted a female voice with a slightly French accent. "What are you doing? What have you done wiz Mizter Filch?" She was pointing her wand at Harry. Mrs. Norris seemed to calm down.

"I didn't..." said Harry, suddenly realizing what it looked like.

"And what iz zat writing about?"

He turned to see where Professor LaVelle was pointing. In a red liquid that looked like blood, he saw the words, *'THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED. ENEMIES OF THE HEIR, BEWARE.'*

"What is going on here?" asked Headmistress McGonagall as she arrived on the scene.

"I didn't..." said Harry, but he was quickly cut off by the Potions mistress.

"All I know iz that I found him here pointing hiz wand at ze cat while Mizter Filch waz lying on ze ground like he iz now."

Aunt Minnie looked shocked. "Harry, what happened?"

"I was walking and found Mr. Filch like this, and then Mrs. Norris came along and growled at me. I pulled out my wand because I thought she was going to attack."

By this time, a small crowd was beginning to form, although most of the Ravensclaws were in their Common Room celebrating their victory. Harry noticed that Professor Flitwick was at the front of the crowd, observing in silence. Professor McGonagall read the writing on the wall and paled.

"Enemies of the Heir, beware!" sneered the voice of Draco Malfoy above the crowd. "The Mudbloods will be next!"

"Twenty points from Slytherin for the use of that foul word, Malfoy," said Minerva. "All of you students, clear the area. All but you, Harry."

"What have I missed?" asked Lockhart, suddenly showing up. Upon noticing Filch's body, he said, "I remember something similar happening in Ouagadougou, a series of attacks, the full story's in my autobiography. It's a pity I wasn't here. I know exactly the counter-curse that could've saved him."

"We'll get him to Madam Pomfrey to determine what exactly has happened to him," Minerva said as she silently levitated the Squib.

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They silently walked back to the hospital wing, where Poppy was able to determine that Filch hadn't been killed, but petrified, though how she couldn't say. However, she did say that the school's Mandrakes could be used to unpetrify Filch once they were fully mature. After Flitwick checked Harry's wand's last spell, Minerva told her nephew that he could go, and told everyone else that he was innocent until

proven guilty. He was grateful that she hadn't revealed his second wand to anyone there.

It was a slightly subdued Harry that arrived at the Common Room. He'd been accused of attacking Filch, but knew he was innocent. However, someone did attack the caretaker, and Harry wanted to know who. After telling 'Al' the password, he opened the door. He felt obligated to tell his housemates that Filch had been petrified, but not about the voice he heard. However, he did tell that to Hermione and Padma the next day while they were at headquarters, away from prying ears. It was about fifteen minutes before the rest of their study group were supposed to arrive.

"Why didn't you tell your aunt?" asked Hermione. "I know that hearing voices isn't good, but she..."

"Do you think I want my aunt to think I've gone nuts?" he asked.

"You're telling us, aren't you?" asked Padma.

"But she might have to tell the board of governors or the Ministry if I tell her."

"I can't believe that Professor LaVelle thought you did it," said Hermione.

Sighing, Harry said, "It did look bad."

"I suppose."

The door swung open, and Ginny, looking a bit pale, walked inside.

"Hi, Ginny," said Harry.

"Hi, guys," she said unenthusiastically.

"Are you alright," asked Hermione. "You seem a bit pale."

"I'm fine," she said quickly. "How are you doing?"

They chatted for a few minutes until the others arrived. Harry and Hermione thought something was a bit off with Ginny, but would

never have guessed what in a million years. After they were done discussing schoolwork, Hermione told them what her copy of *Hogwarts, a History* said about the legend of the Chamber of Secrets, which wasn't much.

When they left, Harry said he wanted to spend a little while alone playing on his Game Boy. He was in the middle of a world when the screen went crazy. There was a pop behind him and he summoned his wand, and turned to face Tribly.

"Harry Potter is still being at Hogwarts! Harry Potter should've gone home! Tribly thought her Snitch would've convinced him..."

"Your Snitch?" he said, now moving toward the elf angrily.

"And now terrible things is beginning, but it's still not too late if Harry Potter is leaving now!"

"So you know about the Chamber of Secrets?"

She now had a solemn look. "It is opened again. Oops!" She then grabbed the boom box and was about to bust it on her head when Harry summoned it away from her.

"You don't have to punish yourself! We can bring the Malfoys up on..." His voice trailed off as she disappeared yet again.

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Harry told Hermione and Padma, as well as Aunt Minnie, about his latest visit, and they didn't have any advice for him. He spent the week doing his best to ignore the stares he was getting from people who believed he was Slytherin's Heir. Harry thought it was funny, considering that Slytherin was the only house the hat didn't consider putting him.

The Ravenclaws were on his side. They were too happy he'd won the Quidditch match to care about anything else. The Slytherins hated him, but knew he wasn't the Heir. Many of the Hufflepuffs seemed content to believe anything bad of the Seeker who beat Diggory. The Gryffindors seemed divided on what they believed. The ones that he

knew personally, like Neville and Ginny, knew he wasn't guilty, but others like a third-year called McLaggen, believed him guilty and let everybody know it. Professor LaVelle never specifically said he was guilty, and actually was very nice to him. However, if someone asked her what she saw, she would tell them that he'd had his wand out and pointed at the cat with Filch's petrified body on the floor.

His aunt had explained that showing a memory of finding the body doesn't prove he hadn't done it earlier and came back. If he had a memory of someone else attacking Filch, that would've been different. She, of course, believed him, but told him that she couldn't treat him differently than any other student. However, in this case, the evidence was entirely circumstantial, and therefore no student would've gotten punished.

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On Saturday night, Brianna called Harry's mirror.

"Hi, Brianna. How'd the trial go?"

"Oh, Jeremy Lightfellow was banned from baseball and was sentenced to three months in jail after I and about ten other people testified against him and the videos of his games were shown."

"That's good. The Cardinals didn't need magic to beat the Cubs," said Harry.

"Yes they did, but that's not the point. I met Lightfellow right after the trial."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "He didn't threaten you, did he?"

"No, not at all. He said he understood. He actually seems like a nice enough person, when he's not cheating against the Cubs that is."

"So, how are mom and dad?"

"They're fine," she said. "How are things at school? Do some people still think you attacked the caretaker?"

“Yeah,” he said with a small smile, “but only the people who don’t know me.”

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The next few weeks went by without incident, and Harry (along with Hermione and Padma) managed to finish another chapter of the Animagus book to turn in to Aunt Minnie. Mrs. Norris was spending most of her time in the hospital wing with Filch. Minerva had to hire someone else to do Filch’s job. This particular wizard, a man with long blonde hair and a long, bushy moustache named Lucus Cleanaway, seemed strict about students obeying the rules, but didn’t talk about hanging students by their thumbs. He actually managed to get the castle cleaned much more quickly using magic. Minerva told them that she had something special planned for Lockhart on Halloween.

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The Halloween Feast was always a marvel to behold. Harry looked around the Great Hall at the decorations. Jack-O-Lanterns suspended above them by magic, a thousand live bats flying between the carved pumpkins and many flaming orange streamers swimming across the ceiling were a few of the decorations filling the largest room in the castle. The desserts were also properly decorated. Pumpkin pies with faces on them that changed expressions, bat-shaped cookies and doughnuts that looked like vampire heads were on the table. Their drinks were charmed to look like blood.

Harry was waiting with anticipation for the entertainment that evening. His aunt wouldn’t give any clues as to what she was planning to do to the great ponce, who was happily consuming a cookie. He was wearing pumpkin-colored robes in honor of the holiday. Minerva took out her wand, and began casting silent spells with it under the table.

Suddenly, a loud scream filled the Great Hall, and everyone stopped eating in order to investigate. It seemed to have emanated from the center of the room. While everyone’s eyes were on the empty air at that location, ten vampires appeared – apparently they were some of the bats – and began walking toward Lockhart, whose face paled.

One of them spoke in an eerie tone of voice. "You are Gilderoy Lockhart. Are you not?"

The fraud was visibly shaking. "Er, no, actually, I'm, er, his brother Barney. Yeah."

"Liar!" the vampire shouted as his clan surrounded their prey. "You have killed several of our brothers."

"NO!" Lockhart screamed, and at this point it sounded like he was close to tears.

"I'll have no more of your lies, Lockhart!" growled the vampire, now showing his fangs. "You wrote about their deaths in your book, *Voyages With Vampires*, bragging about how you slaughtered fifty of my brothers with one curse!"

"W-w-w-well, books can be m-m-misleading," he stuttered, sounding on the brink of hyperventilating as he fell from his chair and tried to climb under the table, only to be stopped by one of the vampires, who got between him and the table.

"You wrote them, and now you shall pay for your crime!"

"I LIED!!!!" shouted Lockhart, now crying. "I NEVER KILLED ONE VAMPIRE!"

"But they are dead, you filthy human! You're just lying to get out of your just punishment."

Now trembling and crying on the floor, he declared, "No! It was Bertha Waterberry! She did it and I obliterated her and took credit!"

The vampire actually smiled for a moment. "I wondered how a sniveling coward like you could've faced one of my kind. Is that what you've done for all your pathetic books?"

"Y-y-y-yes," he declared, too frightened to notice the shocked expressions on the students.

“Let this coward go. We don’t want to poison ourselves with him. Instead, we’ll feed on the children. Is that alright with you, Mr. Lockhart?”

“Y-y-y-yes!” he said. At this moment, he was fully visible to the students, on his knees with a wet spot clearly showing in the front of his orange trousers. His face was pale, and he was trembling and crying as he clumsily stood up.

As soon as he was let go, Gilderoy ran straight for the entrance hall and out the door, shouting, “Goodbye!” leaving now terrified children pulling out their wands and pointing them toward the vampires, who instantly dissolved.

Headmistress McGonagall stood up. “May I have your attention, please? Those vampires were an illusion that I created, so you were never in danger. I suspected that Professor Lockhart was a fraud, and thought that a crisis would be the best way to find out, one way or the other. I apologize for frightening you, but do not regret my actions. You will have a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher next week.” The whole hall erupted in cheers.

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 17 – Revelations

The next morning, Harry woke up a bit later than usual for a Saturday. Ravenclaw (and probably the other three houses as well) had a party the previous night to celebrate the Lockhart's humiliation. Harry believed that even the Slytherins hated the great ponce and were glad to see him go. According to his watch, he still had time to get to breakfast if he hurried, so he hurriedly changed, planning on showering after Quidditch practice, which had been scheduled for right after breakfast. He walked up the stairs to find Hermione and Padma waiting for him. Hermione was talking to the painting of Rowena Ravenclaw that was among the other paintings in the Common Room.

"Good morning, girls," he said.

"What took you so long?" asked Hermione as she turned from the picture. Remembering her manners, she turned back to the painting. "Excuse me. I've got to go."

"That's quite alright, dear. I understand," said the portrait.

Harry said, "I overslept."

"We've missed half of breakfast," said Padma.

"You could have gone on without me," he said. However, seeing their slightly hurt faces, he added, "but I appreciate you waiting for me. Shall we go?" His mom had always taught him to be considerate of other people's feelings. Not that he always did that, but he tried to at least be considerate of his closest friends.

They hurried to the Great Hall and sat down at their table near Luna. After exchanging morning greetings with her, Harry put a stack of pancakes on his plate. He was reaching for some sausage when he heard a voice behind him as a hand landed on his left shoulder.

"There you two are," said Michelle. Harry's face turned red as his crush kicked in. He felt his elbow land in something.

"Yes, we're here, Michelle," said Hermione, stifling her laughter and distracting their captain as Harry pulled his elbow out of the butter dish. Padma was hiding her face, but her ears were tomato red.

"I was wondering if you overslept or something. Remember that practice starts in twenty minutes, so you'd better hurry. Bye."

As soon as Michelle was out of earshot, Hermione 'innocently' suggested, "Why don't you wipe your elbow off on your pancakes?" This had the immediate effect of both she and Padma bursting out laughing while Harry buried his face in his hands.

"I'm never gonna live this down, am I?" he murmured through his fingers as the girls continued laughing.

"I don't see what's so funny," said Luna dreamily. "Harry was merely trying to make the plothglotes go away. It's a very good idea, Harry, although you probably should've rolled up your sleeve first." She then rolled up the right sleeve of her jumper and purposely dipped her own elbow into the butter dish to the shock of everyone watching.

At that moment, the door from the entrance hall burst open, revealing thirty aurors, wands brandished and ready to fight. They looked around the hall in total confusion. One from the back, who was apparently the leader, walked forward and spoke while looking at the head table.

"Headmistress McGonagall?"

She stood up and began walking toward them, holding her own wand. "That's me. Is there something I can help you with, auror? And why have you interrupted our breakfast?" she asked sternly.

Putting his wand back in its holster and signaling the others to do the same, he replied. "We just received a report from Gilderoy Lockhart that 1,000 vampires killed all the staff and students while he fought bravely, barely surviving himself." The whole Great Hall burst out laughing.

It was obvious to Harry that Minerva was having a hard time stopping herself from joining in the mirth of that moment. "Is that what he

claimed happened?" she asked. "Why don't you come to my office, and I and the heads of houses will explain what actually occurred last night?"

At that moment, a flock of owls flew in, carrying the mail, along with the newspapers. One flew directly in front of the headmistress, so after saying, "Excuse me for a moment," to the auror, she untied the parcel and gave the bird the appropriate payment. She unrolled her copy of the Daily Prophet and her mouth fell open. It had a picture of Gilderoy Lockhart, his expressions moving from tearful to angry every few seconds. She glanced at the cover story.

"Vampires Massacre Hogwarts – Lockhart vows Vengeance

By Rita Skeeter

This reporter was saddened terribly to hear of the slaughter that occurred last night at Hogwarts during the Halloween celebration. One thousand vampires attacked, intent on killing everyone present. The lone survivor, the famous Gilderoy Lockhart, put up a tremendous fight, taking out at least a hundred, staying and fighting well into the night until the last student was bitten. Realizing that it was a hopeless cause, he fled the grounds, outflying hundreds of vampire bats on his Comet 260 broom in an effort to warn the authorities, and let everyone know the tragedy that occurred last night.

'I believe that it is my solemn duty to let the public know exactly what happened, so I will spend the next few months putting it down in my next book, and then I shall hunt down these creatures capable of attacking our children...' The article went on to describe Lockhart's life-and-death struggle against overwhelming odds.

"Doesn't that so-called reporter even verify facts before publishing them?" Minerva nearly screamed. She then faced the students. "I believe that all of you should write your families immediately to let them know you are safe."

Harry whispered to Hermione, "I called Brianna last night to tell her about Lockhart, so she already knows."

"I'm glad my parents don't get the Prophet," said Hermione.

The headmistress then turned her attention back to the aurors. “I believe that we’ll also need a reporter here as well – not this Rita Skeeter person. I want someone reliable. You may also wish to arrest Mr. Lockhart after hearing what we have to say. Actually,” she said thoughtfully, “It may be best if you watch the memory of the event.”

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Minerva’s group disappeared to her office, where she later told Harry that she showed the aurors and the reporter who showed up a bit later the memory of the ‘vampire attack.’ She also gave the aurors a copy of her memory of Lockhart’s Boggarts to assist them in finding the actual heroes that he had obliviated.

Harry and Hermione went to Quidditch practice, which went very well. Harry was fortunately able to fly practically by complete instinct, and it would take a lot more than an embarrassment to keep him away from the Snitch. However, Hermione did seem to take on the important responsibility of making sure that Harry did not forget the ‘elbow in the butter dish’ incident for the rest of the day, although she did have assistance from Padma as well.

Harry thought that the worst part of his humiliation was when their study group met and Luna still had butter on her elbow. She said, “Harry, the butter must have come off your elbow. You need to get more.” After Hermione happily filled everyone in on what had happened, they all laughed at Harry (who was hiding his face behind a book) except for Luna and Ginny, who seemed to have something bothering her again.

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The next morning at breakfast, Minerva made an announcement. “I’d like your attention, everyone. This is Professor Tutamun. She will be your new Defense Against the Dark Arts Teacher.”

Harry looked at the woman that was no taller than Professor Flitwick. She had long, curly red hair and a tan complexion. She looked like a little girl playing dress-up in her amber dress, but her face had a grown-up, but friendly, expression. Harry thought she was in her early thirties. The students began clapping politely.

The Headmistress continued once the applause died down. "She was an auror in Ireland until she was injured by a dark curse about a year ago and had to retire. She has requested different textbooks than *the ones* that you are currently using." Aunt Minnie spat out the words 'the ones' with obvious disgust. We have taken the liberty of ordering your new books, which Professor Tutamun will distribute to you in your classes. We will buy the old books back in trade, returning the difference in price to your parents, unless of course you wish to keep Mr. Lockhart's books, in which case you'll have to pay for the new books. I believe that they were about three Galleons each. Your heads of house will handle those transactions. That is all." She then sat down next to the new professor.

"That's nice of them to buy the books back," whispered Hermione.

Harry smiled at her. "Aunt Minnie told me yesterday that they got the gold from Lockhart's trunk. They're keeping everything he left here. Of course, I don't know who would want his outfits."

"Maybe they can be sent to Snape," suggested Padma, causing everyone who heard her to chuckle.

At that point, the mail, including the Daily Prophet, arrived. Although he didn't subscribe, Harry had requested that particular issue. He wanted to keep it. He grinned as he examined the front page after paying the owl.

"Hogwarts Wasn't Attacked! Gilderoy Lockhart – a Fraud! Rita Skeeter – a Fool!"

By Anna Jesse

Today, the Daily Prophet has the sad duty to retract the story about the alleged attack upon Hogwarts that Gilderoy Lockhart reported to Rita Skeeter – former reporter – who failed to verify this story before printing it, causing a widespread panic among the wizarding population, especially parents who read that their children had been killed or changed into vampires. Headmistress McGonagall has allowed this reporter to view her memory of what really happened Halloween night in her Pensieve. This is the truth of what happened."

The article continued by telling the truth of what had happened that night, including the revelation that Lockhart was a fraud and that Rita Skeeter had simply taken his word for what happened without checking it out for herself. As a result, she was sacked and her reputation ruined. Another article told of Lockhart's arrest, along with the investigation of charges of illegal use of the *Obliviation* charm as well as fraud.

When breakfast was over, Harry noticed that Professor Tutamun was walking with a cane, and that it appeared that her left foot was a fake. Without commenting on it, Harry, Hermione and Padma made their way to C.A.R.E. headquarters to revise for a few hours before enjoying the rest of Sunday, especially when they turned their Lockhart books over to Professor Flitwick.

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It wasn't until Tuesday afternoon that the Ravenclaws had class with their new Defense teacher. Right after lunch, they went straight into the classroom with the Hufflepuffs. There was a new book on each desk.

"Good afternoon, class," said Professor Tutamun in what sounded like a friendly voice. She was wearing silver robes, and her long, red hair was in a pony tail.

"Morning," about half the students mumbled.

"As you should know if you pay attention to announcements, my name is Professor Tutamun. The first thing we'll do is take attendance, so raise your hand when I call your name."

When she finished taking roll call, she continued, "You have undoubtedly noticed your new textbooks on your desks. I expect you to read a chapter every week and to do the review questions at the end of each chapter to turn in every Tuesday, along with a one-foot summary of each chapter." All of the class except Hermione groaned. Harry knew they'd have to work hard over the next week or two in order to get ahead in this class. "My question for you is this: Did you learn anything in this class for the past few months besides Lockhart's favorite color, or was it a complete waste of time?"

"Yes, Mr. Finch-Fletchley?" she asked when Justin raised his hand.

"We learned what a Yeti looks like about a month ago."

"But that was from whoever pulled that prank," said Susan Bones.
"Not from Lockhart."

"How about if I assume that you didn't learn anything," said Tutamun over the laughter that began when the class was reminded of that prank. "If I cover something you've already gone over, then it'll be a review."

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The class went much better than any other D.A.D.A. class Harry had been through at Hogwarts before. Although some of what she covered had been a review from his American school, most of it was new material. Aside from the amount of homework she assigned, he liked this new teacher.

The rest of the week passed by quickly, with him and Hermione using their extra time to get a few weeks ahead of the schedule. Padma was happy that on Thursday afternoon, Matthew Shapon taught Transfiguration. When Harry commented on her crush, she said, "At least I didn't put my elbow in a butter dish," effectively shutting him up.

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Saturday morning's newspaper revealed that Lockhart had been arrested, and ten of the people he'd *Obliviated* had been located and their memories restored. They were waiting until they could find as many victims as possible before holding his trial. Harry was reading a copy he'd borrowed at breakfast when Hermione tapped his shoulder.

"Isn't that the same bloke that was with Madam Grubbly last game?"

He looked at the staff table to see that his best friend was indeed correct. "You're right. I guess he's here to see the Gryffindor versus Slytherin game."

"I guess so," said Hermione. "I wish I knew who he was."

Padma added, "We'll finally get to find out who Gryffindor's new Seeker is."

After breakfast, they watched the gamekeeper walk out toward the grounds hand-in-hand with her visitor. They stopped when the headmistress called out, "Mr. Plank."

"Yes," said the man when he'd turned around.

"You forgot your cloak. It's getting chilly outside."

Harry noticed that his aunt was carrying a long, brown cloak to the couple.

"Did you see that ring?" asked Padma, excitedly, as soon as they were out of earshot.

Hermione squealed, "Of course!"

At the same moment, Harry said, "Huh?"

Both girls looked at him with pity. "Honestly, how can you find a tiny glint of gold flying around the Quidditch pitch when you can't see a ring on someone's finger?" asked Hermione.

"I'm looking for the Snitch," said Harry defensively as his ears turned pink, "not for other people's jewelry." He then sighed. "So, she was wearing a ring."

"Not just any ring," said Padma enthusiastically. "An engagement ring with a large diamond..."

Not really interested in the description, Harry tuned out the rest of it as they made their way toward the Ravenclaw stands. One thing that Harry was interested in is scouting out the new Gryffindor Seeker. The only thing he knew for sure about this bloke was that he'd have been scouting him a month ago when he played. They were soon seated high up with the other second-years, as well as Luna. Penny Clearwater was sitting nearby, wearing a Gryffindor scarf. Harry figured that her boyfriend, Captain Oliver Wood, had given it to her. He was interrupted from his thoughts by Lee Jordan's announcing.

“Welcome to the second Quidditch game of the year – Gryffindor versus Slytherin!” Harry joined in the cheers that the game would begin.

“I give you, the Gryffindor Team!” Harry continued cheering while the Slytherins booed. He was definitely on Gryffindor’s side for this match.

“Captain and Keeper – Oliver Wood!” Penelope cheered louder than all the Gryffindors put together, in Harry’s opinion.

“Those unbeatable Beaters – Fred and George Weasley!” Harry cheered for his partners in crime.

“The lovely Chasers. Sorry, professor. Alicia Spinnet, Katie Bell, and the beautiful, Angelina Johnson, who still won’t go out with me. Sorry, professor.” Harry laughed.

“And now, making her debut, the youngest Seeker in a century – Ginny Weasley!” Harry’s jaw dropped when he saw the first-year zooming out onto the pitch wearing robes that matched her hair. “Her older brother Charlie was the best Seeker Gryffindor ever had. We’ll find out if she’s going to continue that tradition!” Harry managed to clap for his friend as he stared in surprise. He didn’t even pay attention while the Slytherins were introduced. He wondered if her Quidditch practices were the reason she’d seemed down lately. However, looking at her happy, yet determined, face, he didn’t think that she was worried about the game.

He watched Flint try to break Oliver’s hand under the guise of sportsmanship, and wondered yet again what the point of that gesture was. Soon enough, the Quaffle was tossed in the air, and the game began.

Angelina Johnson grabbed the Quaffle first, and proceeded to lead the Gryffindors to getting the first goal of the game in less than two minutes. Harry always enjoyed watching the genius of Fred and George sending Bludgers at the opposite team, although he supposed it wouldn’t be as enjoyable to watch when he became the target during their February game. However, he turned his attention to the players he’d have to beat – the Gryffindor and Slytherin Seekers – Ginny Weasley and Terrence Higgs, respectively.

He'd seen Higgs play before, during the previous year, but had never seen Ginny play. He watched as both Seekers circled the pitch, but noticed how they would both glance at each other every minute or so to make sure the other hadn't spotted the elusive tiny winged ball. Three times, Ginny had to avoid a Bludger sent after her for no good reason during that time. During one of those 'mutual glances' between the two Seekers, Harry noticed the Snitch appear directly below Higgs, but it was gone before either player spotted it.

For a few minutes, he turned his attention to the Chasers, and wasn't surprised to see that the Slytherin Chasers were using their bulk to bully Gryffindor Chasers, since they actually had no Quidditch skills at all. He honestly wondered sometimes if Madam Hooch was blind the way that the Slytherins got away with their 'strategy' in front of hundreds of witnesses every game. Nevertheless, the Gryffindor Lions were winning at 160 to 90 points. The only thing that could save Slytherin was their Seeker.

He was still contemplating this when Lee Jordan announced, "It looks like Ginny Weasley has seen the Snitch!" He turned his attention to the streak of red making a dive toward the ground at the center of the pitch. Harry noticed Higgs coming from the opposite direction. He followed Ginny's line of sight and saw that this was no feint. The glint of gold was about 5 feet from the redhead, but 8 feet from Higgs. She easily grabbed it out of the air a moment later.

As she raised her hand triumphantly, he saw one of Slytherin's Beaters hit a Bludger toward her back. Harry pulled his wand out to try and interfere, but then saw that there was no need. One of Gryffindor's twin Beaters had flown in, protecting his little sister, and rammed the Bludger right into the offending Beater's face, breaking his nose. Madam Hooch blew her whistle and started yelling at the Weasley twin as they landed. However, Aunt Minnie made her way toward them.

Harry turned to Hermione, Padma and Luna. "Let's see what happens."

Without waiting for a response, he climbed down the bleachers and got within earshot in time to hear his Scottish aunt yell, "Are you blind,

Rolanda? Bole hit the Bludger at Miss Weasley after the game was over in front of hundreds of witnesses! Mr. Weasley merely defended his sister. He will not have any punishment. However, Mr. Bole will be suspended from Slytherin's next game, and will serve a detention. And he certainly disserved the minor injury that he caused himself."

Madam Hooch seemed very offended that the Headmistress overrode her judgment. Coldly, she said, "It has always been tradition to allow the Quidditch referee to decide what penalties to give to players over incidents that occur during a game."

Minerva's face was pink with rage. "It's also traditional for the referee to *open her eyes* at least once during the matches! I know that Dumbledore let you get away with turning a blind eye toward your former house's murder attempts as long as you give your *clean game* speech before each match, but that is no longer the case!"

Hooch seemed nervous. "I, I haven't..."

"Not as blatantly as Snape did, but you have allowed Slytherin to get away with far too much cheating for it to be accidental and I will not allow that to continue." Minerva's expression lightened a bit. "Besides, this incident occurred after the game was over, making it very clearly my jurisdiction."

At that moment, Ginny nervously walked toward the quartet of Ravenclaws, taking their attention away from school administration. "Er, hi guys."

"Hey, Ginny," said Harry, "How come you didn't tell us you were the new Seeker?"

Her ears turned pink, "Well, Oliver wanted to keep it a secret, especially from Non-Gryffindor's. I would've told you, but was sworn to secrecy."

"You did really good out there," said Hermione.

"Especially considering the Nargle infestation on the pitch," added Luna. "They were blocking Madam Hooch's view of the game."

"You might be right about the Nargles blocking Madam Hooch's view," said Harry as he chuckled. "Ginny, you did good."

Padma added, "Really good."

Ginny looked directly at Harry. "I know I wasn't as good as you, but I have a few months to practice before we face off, and I *will* get the Snitch that game."

He grinned at her. "We'll see about *that*, but right now, the important thing is that you didn't let the Slytherin Seeker get the Snitch."

"Never!" agreed Ginny happily. "Anyway, I've got to get to the changing room."

"You'd better hurry up," said Harry. "I'm sure they're getting ready for a party in Gryffindor Tower."

She took off toward the changing rooms, and Hermione suggested that they go to headquarters to study. Luna declined, saying, "I want to see if I can catch one of the Nargles before they're all gone."

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The rest of the weekend went by quickly, and before he knew it, Monday morning had arrived, and Harry was in Double-Potions class partnered up with Hermione. They were making a magical cleaning solution that Professor LaVelle had assigned them.

"All that's left is for us to stir it twice clockwise and once counterclockwise," said Hermione after double-checking their book.

"Alright," said Harry as he began to follow the directions. Suddenly, the liquid in the cauldron began to act strangely. "Er, Hermione, is it supposed to bubble?"

Her eyes widened. "No! That can only happen if you add..."

BOOM!!!

Padma, who was sitting nearby, screamed as she watched her closest friends knocked to the ground by their exploding cauldron. They were both unconscious and had burns on their hands and faces. Pieces of the cauldron and the book they were working out of were on top of them, along with pieces of the table.

The teacher appeared scared, but quickly took control. "Calm down, everybody. Mr. Corner, could you go quickly to the hospital wing and bring Madam Pomfrey here?" He nodded and took off. "Class is dismissed. Miss Patil, I know you're a close friend of theirs. You may stay if you wish."

Together, the teacher and student summoned the junk off of Harry and Hermione. Professor LaVelle was very impressed that she knew the summoning charm already. They had just unburied the victims when Madam Pomfrey arrived.

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"So, they'll both be alright?" said a worried voice in the distance. Harry thought it sounded familiar as he groggily opened his eyes. He felt some sort of lotion on his face and the back of his hands as he looked around the blurry room, realizing that he didn't have his glasses on.

"Yes, Headmistress. They won't even have a scar."

"Very well. I shall inform both of their parents."

Harry turned to see the blurred image of his aunt rummaging through her purse, obviously looking for her mirror. "Aunt Minnie," he said with a scratchy voice, suddenly realizing that he was quite thirsty.

"Harry," she turned and looked at him, but he was unable to determine her expression. "You're awake."

"H-how long?"

"Have you been unconscious?" she asked. He nodded. "About a half-hour. Miss Patil just left for lunch."

“Pr-Professor McGonagall?” said Hermione’s voice, unsteadily from Harry’s left. He turned and saw a blurry figure lying on a bed near his and realized that he was in the hospital wing. “What happened?”

“You were in Potions class and your cauldron exploded,” she said grimly. “Professor LaVelle found that it had been tampered with, although she has no idea who did it or why.”

Harry said, “If we were with the Slytherins, I’d think that Malfoy did it. But we weren’t.”

“Right now, you just worry about getting some rest. Madam Pomfrey has told me that you’ll both have to spend the night.”

“But we’ll miss Charms class!” said Hermione frantically.

“Professor Flitwick has already been informed,” Minerva answered. “By the way, your special schoolbags were undamaged, as were the contents. It is fortunate that you kept them under the desk instead of on it. Otherwise, the explosion would have destroyed them. As it was, a bit of wood landed on top of them without causing any harm.”

“That’s good,” said Harry.

“I guess my potions book was destroyed,” said Hermione sadly.

“I’m afraid so,” said Minerva.

“Would you like to have a funeral for it, Hermione,” asked Harry with a smirk.

“Hermione, stop,” said the Headmistress firmly. “Deserving as my nephew may be, if you toss that pillow at him, it may touch the salve on his face and interrupt the healing process. If he retaliates, he may do the same to you. You’ll have to get him back later, after you’re fully recovered.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

As he looked at his aunt’s blurry face, he decided to ask, “Where are my glasses?”

"They were broken in the explosion..."

"What?" he interrupted, panicking. "I can hardly see without them. I can't go back to classes tomorrow. I..."

"Harry," said Minerva gently. "You interrupted me. Madam Pomfrey performed a *reparo* spell on them once she was done treating you two. However, she kept them with her because she's afraid that if you wear them, they'll get the salve all over them and she'll have to reapply it to your face. I'm afraid you'll have to rough it until tomorrow morning."

"Then I guess I can't study even if I wanted to now," he replied.

"I suppose," agreed Hermione, "although I could read the next chapter of our defense book to you."

-

When Padma returned for a quick visit before Charms, she found Hermione reading a textbook out loud to Harry. Minerva had left to call both sets of parents with her mirror.

"I'm glad to see you're both awake," she said, smiling.

"Thanks for coming," said Harry.

"I'm glad to see you, of course," said Hermione, glancing at the clock on the wall, "but you've only got ten minutes to get to Charms."

"I just wanted to make sure you two were alright."

"We are," said Harry, "but Madam Pomfrey says we have to spend the night."

"Please come back after class to let us know what Professor Flitwick went over," asked Hermione.

"Sure," Padma said. "Do you know what went wrong with your potion?"

Harry nodded. "It was sabotaged."

-

They speculated for a few minutes until Padma had to leave, but they had no idea who in that classroom would want to sabotage their cauldron. Madam Pomfrey then gave them both potions to drink before lunch was brought for them. She also reminded them not to touch their faces when they got itchy later. Once she was done eating, Hermione resumed reading the textbook to Harry.

Later that day, the entire study group visited the two in the hospital wing. When they were told about the sabotage, Luna said she suspected Wracknoles. They left after an hour, and Hermione resumed reading to Harry, who drifted off to sleep while she was reading a chapter out of their Charms book.

He awoke in the middle of the night (he couldn't read the clock to see exactly what time it was) with his face extremely itchy like he'd been warned it would be, but knew that hadn't been why he'd woken up. There was someone else in the room that didn't belong there. He heard footsteps, but couldn't see anybody, even squinting. Suddenly, a blurry house-elf was standing on a chair next to his bed.

"Harry Potter, sir, must realize that Hogwarts is far too dangerous. Tribbly hopes that Harry Potter will leave now."

"I must," Harry began, "Hold on. You caused the explosion. Didn't you?" he demanded.

The elf's ears drooped downward as she nervously fidgeted. "It was all for Harry Potter's own good..."

"YOU TRIED TO KILL ME AND HERMIONE FOR MY OWN GOOD!?"

"Not kill you!" the elf exclaimed, "Never kill you."

Harry reached out a hand and grabbed Tribbly angrily. "You could have KILLED us! If Hermione..."

“Wh-what’s going on?” said a groggy Hermione, who had obviously just gotten up. The elf snapped her fingers and disappeared out of Harry’s grasp.

“Go back to sleep, Hermione,” said Harry gently. “I’ll tell you about it in the morning. I’m sorry I woke you.”

She turned on her bed while yawning. “Night, Harry,” she said tiredly before going right back to sleep.

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“That elf is insane!” declared Hermione the next morning in an uncharacteristically angry manner for talking about house-elves. She tried to kill us to get you to leave Hogwarts.”

“I don’t think she’s right in the head,” agreed Harry, who was happy to be wearing his glasses again. “I think Lucius hit her one too many times. Maybe we should turn him in for elf abuse.”

“Perhaps you should wait on that for a more opportune moment,” suggested Minerva, who was visiting them that morning before they left the hospital wing. “After all, you don’t want her to think that freedom is a reward for trying to blow you two up.” It was obvious that Aunt Minnie had no pity for Tribbly after the stunt she’d just pulled, and probably wanted to beat that elf herself. He quite understood her feelings. If the elf hadn’t disappeared when she did, he’d have probably strangled her for hurting Hermione.

“I suppose we can wait,” said Harry. He cleared his throat when Hermione glared at him. “Er, to get more evidence of the abuse.” The fact that Hermione didn’t object proved to Harry that Tribbly hadn’t exactly endeared herself to his best friend, either.

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For the next month, nothing was seen or heard of Tribbly or the Chamber of Secrets. They were happy to read in the Daily Prophet that Lockhart had been sentenced to five years in Azkaban, along with a hefty fine distributed to his victims. The most interesting thing that happened at Hogwarts was in late November, when Professor

Burbage, the Muggle Studies teacher, took her third-year class (which included Cho Chang) to C.A.R.E. headquarters, where Harry and Hermione were excused from their classes to demonstrate their boom box and Game Boy for the class.

"But what's spinning the sedie?" asked one boy.

"The cd," said Hermione patiently, "which stands for compact disc, is being spun around inside the boom box by electricity."

"I don't see a plug," he answered, attempting to sound intelligent.

"That's because there isn't one," said Harry. "Muggles have two different basic ways of getting electricity to something. Plugs are one of them, and batteries are the other."

The whole class' eyes widened before a girl asked, "There are bat-trees in that?"

Harry could almost feel Hermione roll her eyes behind him. "Yes. There are bat-ter-ies inside it. Let me show you." He then opened the battery chamber to show them the four D batteries inside it while most of the students gasped in surprise.

"You see," said Professor Charity Burbage, "Muggles have found many fascinating ways to live without magic. How many of you have even heard of a magical device that holds music that you can listen to anytime you want? Not the Wireless that lets you listen to whatever they happen to be playing at the time. Something that actually stores music."

Only one person raised his hand. After being called on, the tall boy with blue eyes and brown hair said, "A Pensieve."

The teacher smiled. "Correct. Five points to Hufflepuff." She turned to the rest of her class. "A Pensieve is a very rare and expensive device that allows you to relive memories of your own, or anyone else who donates them. Those of you who went to Professor Snape's hearing saw many Pensieve memories played for us. If one donated the memory of a concert, then that would be the equivalent of a cd. The difference is that in the muggle world, they are relatively inexpensive

and common. The Ministry uses small globes known as thought spheres to permanently record certain information for playback. If those were used to record music, they would be cheaper than getting a Pensieve, but still not as inexpensive as a cd. This is a way that the muggle world is superior to our own.”

That declaration caused a lot of murmuring. The professor continued.

“I know that many of you have been taught that we are superior to muggles in every way, but the fact is that this is a lie. We simply have the ability to use magic. We are not superior to them in any other way. In fact, having to live without magic has made many muggles much smarter than us. They’ve actually had to figure out how to do things without waving a wand and reciting magic words. Next year, we’ll be taking a trip to a house equipped with what’s known as a television and I’ll show you a type of wand that muggles invented, called a remote control.”

Harry and Hermione were greatly amused by that comparison, and the rest of the class went very well. It was hard to believe how fascinated they were with the cd player, and the concept that each cd had something different on it. However, nothing compared to their reaction to Harry turning on a flashlight at the end of the lesson.

“What kind of a wand is that?” shouted one person.

“That’s a powerful *lumos* spell you’ve got there, Harry,” said another.

“That’s not a spell,” said Harry with a grin. “This is another muggle device that uses batteries called a flashlight. The muggles have their own equivalent to almost every spell we have.”

“Even the dark spells?” asked Cho nervously.

“I’m afraid so,” said Professor Burbage. “They have many weapons to hurt each other with. They have what’s called a gun, which, similar to the flashlight, is like a wand that performs only one spell. It sends a small piece of lead called a bullet through you, putting a hole in your body. No shield spell can stop it. It can be as lethal, even to wizards, as the Killing Curse if it hits the correct parts of your body.” The class gasped. “However, that’s nothing compared to the weapons that

muggle militaries have.” She took a deep breath. “But, enough about that. Suffice it to say that both wizards and muggles have plenty of ways to kill each other. Any other questions?”

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The year was proceeding normally after that, and most of the students were looking forward to visiting their families at Christmas. Brianna had mentioned that she’d been drafted to be in a kids’ play at their church and had to go to practices. Ginny had been in good spirits ever since her Quidditch victory, and the others thought that she was back to her old self. On Friday, December 18th, Harry was walking with Hermione and Padma toward the Ravenclaw Common Room after dinner.

“I’m so glad that our last test is over!” said Padma.

“Me, too,” agreed Harry. “Although I must admit that I much preferred Professor Tutamun’s Defense final to what Lockhart would’ve given us.”

Hermione said, “I thought...”

Harry did not hear whatever it was that his best friend thought, because at that moment, he heard something else.

“Let me rip you. Let me eat you. Let me kill...”

“What!” interrupted Harry.

The two girls looked astonished. Hermione asked, “Harry, what’s wrong?”

“I heard it again. The same voice before Filch got petrified. This way.” Without looking back, he ran in the direction the voice had been coming from, until he stopped at one of the strangest sights of his life.

The Ravenclaw ghost was lying down in mid-air, petrified. On the other side of her, Justin Finch Fletchley of Hufflepuff was on the floor, stiff as a board. Harry bent down to check Justin when a familiar voice called out. “You! I had hoped zat eet waz a coincedenze when

you were wiz Mizter Filch. But now you are wiz ze next victim az well!" Professor LaVelle had her wand pointed at Harry.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Flitwick, as he came upon the situation. "Madam, why do you have a wand pointed at one of my students?"

"I have found zis boy at ze seen of yet anozer crime."

"Then let's call the headmistress," said Flitwick before summoning a Patronus to fetch Minerva.

"She iz hiz aunt. She will not punish him."

About a minute later, the Headmistress showed up and asked what had happened. After she'd been told what LaVelle saw and then what Hermione (who did not mention Harry hearing the voice) saw, she turned to her nephew. "Harry, I do believe you, but I will have to restrict your movements a bit to satisfy those that don't. I can't give you special treatment. You will not be allowed anywhere alone except for Ravenclaw Tower and the lavatories." She turned to the Potions teacher. "Will that satisfy you, or do you believe that Hermione Granger, a Muggle-born herself, is also attacking the Muggle-born students?"

"Zat will satisfy me, for now."

"Very well. Harry, I would like to talk to you alone, about our travel arrangements for the holiday."

"Alright."

They walked in silence until they reached an empty classroom. Once they were inside, Minerva silenced the door and rounded on her nephew. "I know that you haven't been attacking people, Harry. But I also know that you're not telling me everything you know. There has got to be a reason that you've been at the scenes of both attacks. Don't try to tell me that it's just bad luck."

Harry looked at the floor and shifted nervously.

“Harry,” she said as she squatted down to look him in the face. “Harry, I love you, and I want to help, but you’ve got to be honest with me.”

“I, I’ve been hearing a voice.”

“What?” asked Minerva, looking a bit nervous.

“It was talking about killing. I followed it to Mr. Filch the day he was attacked, and to Justin today.” He didn’t notice, but a few tears had started to flow down his face. “Hermione and Padma couldn’t hear the voice, but I didn’t attack anyone. I didn’t want to tell you cause you probably think I’m crazy now. I...”

Aunt Minnie engulfed him in a hug. “I don’t think you’re crazy, Harry. I don’t understand what’s going on, but I know it’s not your fault.” She backed up to look him in the eyes again. “I also know that the voice you’re hearing is real. Otherwise it wouldn’t lead you to the victims. However, if you hear that voice again, don’t follow it. Instead, call me on your mirror. Bring it with you all the time when you’re at Hogwarts.”

“Okay, Aunt Minnie. But how can I hear a voice that no one else can?”

She hugged him tightly again. “I don’t know. It may have something to do with your true identity. I just don’t know. I will try to find out why.”

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The next day at their study group, Ginny seemed very withdrawn and quiet again, and Harry wondered if it had something to do with the attack. However, he pushed that thought to the back of his mind as he prepared for Christmas break.

Like last year, both Harry and Minerva rode the carriage to Hogsmeade with his friends and then apparated (Minnie side-alonged him) from there to the magical section of the airport, and flooed to America from there.

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“Harry!” shouted Cindy McGonagall as she ran to her son and engulfed him in a big hug. Harry had to put down Hedwig’s cage. She was still squawking in protest of floo travel. “You’ve gotten taller,” his mom commented when she let him breathe.

“Aunt Minnie!” said Brianna while hugging her great aunt. “I’ve missed you. I can’t wait until next year when I get to see you every day.”

“But then you won’t see *us* every day, Brianna,” countered Mark, before he hugged his aunt.

They made their way home from O’Hare, and everyone but the travelers went to bed, because it was still very early for them. As had happened the previous year, the Christmas tree was already up, but the presents weren’t under it. They had saved that job for Harry, which he did quite quickly with his perfect summoning charm. When he was dividing them up, he noticed one labeled ‘To Harry and Brianna, From Mom and Dad.’ It was a rectangular box wrapped in green paper, and had gotten his attention.

“Don’t look too closely at the presents,” said Minerva, who was sitting on the couch, with a smirk.

“Don’t worry, Aunt Minnie. I’d never peek at my presents in front of you.”

She chuckled slightly. “I do believe that.”

A few hours later, the rest of the family went into the living room. Mark said, “Good. You’ve put the presents under the tree. I see you put the one to you and your sister at the front.”

“Um, well, it looked interesting, but I didn’t peek.”

“Sure you didn’t,” said Brianna sarcastically.

“Aunt Minnie was here the whole time,” he answered defensively.

“Anyway,” said Cindy. “We thought we’d let the two of you open it now, since Harry won’t be able to use it while he’s at Hogwarts.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Harry as he grabbed the gift. His sister joined in ripping the paper off of the box to find...a Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Both kids were thrilled to death to have the latest video game system, and Harry had it hooked up to their TV in fifteen minutes, and they were playing Super Mario World.

-

Most of that day was spent ‘testing’ the new gift, and over the next few days, Harry was taken to his eye doctor and dentist. His mom also made sure to measure him so she could buy him new clothes. She didn’t bother buying that kind of thing until he was back home because she wanted them to actually fit him. Harry talked with Hermione on his mirror a few times, and also arranged to see most of his local friends after Christmas.

His family went to a Christmas play on Thursday, Christmas Eve, at their church, where Brianna played the starring role of Mary. Harry thought she did a good job, but would never admit it. He said she did okay.

-

Harry woke up early the next morning to the sound of his mirror being called. Groggily, he grabbed his glasses with one hand and his mirror with the other.

After yawning, he said, “Hello,” sleepily.

“Happy Christmas, Harry!” said his best friend excitedly.

Harry blinked as what she said registered. “Oh, Merry Christmas, Hermione.”

Her expression faltered for a moment. “I didn’t wake you, did I? I thought I’d waited long enough.”

He couldn’t help but smile. “Don’t worry about it. You seem happy today. Did you get a good haul?”

“Yes! I got a lot of good presents. The best one is this!” He saw that she laid her mirror on the floor and then held a familiar ginger cat in front of it. “I got Crookshanks!” she declared. “Remember, he’s that cat I saw last summer at...”

“Now I remember,” Harry said with a grin. Not that he liked the cat so much, but that he liked seeing his friend happy. “So nobody bought him, then. That’s lucky.”

“Yes! I’m so glad mum and dad remembered, and I couldn’t wait to tell you! I guess I should let you get out of bed and open your presents. Bye.” His very excited friend hung up before he could say anything else. He chuckled as he got out of bed.

Harry made his way downstairs to find Brianna already there waiting.

“You didn’t happen to wake mom and dad up, did you?” she asked.

“No, but they should be up soon. Hermione just woke me up.”

“She called you, huh. Couldn’t wait to wish her boyfriend a...”

“I’m NOT her boyfriend. We’re just good friends.” Harry then grinned. “How’s Bobby doing?”

“Fine,” she said as her ears turned pink.

“Merry Christmas!” came the voice of their dad behind them. They turned to see him, their mom and their aunt all joining them.

“Merry Christmas, dad,” the siblings said together. After they’d all greeted each other, they started opening their presents. Harry got mostly clothes, cd’s and Game Boy games from his family, although his aunt had gotten him an illustrated book on Seeker tactics. Hermione had given him two new games. Other Hogwarts friends had gotten him various magical sweets. The last gift he opened was by far the most interesting.

When he picked it up, he found that it was very light. He unwrapped it and something fluid and silvery gray went slithering to the floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Harry gasped. The boy had read about

something that fit this description, but surely no one would give him an invisibility cloak.

“What is it,” asked Brianna. He glanced up to see everyone staring at it.

He picked up the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material. A note fell out of it as he did so. Aunt Minnie picked up the note. Her face paled as she glanced at it. She absently passed the note to Harry, who looked at the narrow, loopy writing he had never seen before.

“Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.”

A Very Happy Christmas to you, Harry Potter.”

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Harry McGonagall – Chapter 18 – Who Knows What?

He picked up the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It was strange to the touch, like water woven into material. A note fell out of it as he did so. Aunt Minnie picked up the note. Her face paled as she glanced at it. She absently passed the note to Harry, who looked at the narrow, loopy writing he had never seen before.

“Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.

A Very Happy Christmas to you, Harry Potter.”

“Someone found me!” Harry declared, not sure if he should be scared or not.

“Maybe they just sent an owl and got lucky,” suggested Brianna.

“No, Harry,” said Minerva. “Long ago, I performed a spell to make owls recognize you as Harry McGonagall and not Harry Potter. Otherwise you’d have been found almost immediately by someone simply following an owl. No one can find you that way. Even if that weren’t true, it wouldn’t matter in this case. I recognize that writing, and know who sent this to you.”

“Who?” asked Cindy.

“Albus Dumbledore.”

“WHAT!?!” shouted everyone at once.

Minnie sighed. “He told me that he was going to dedicate himself to finding the Boy-Who-Lived, and it looks like he has.”

“But why did he send me a present and not just show up here?” asked Harry.

“That’s a good question,” said Mark. “What do you think, Aunt Minnie?”

"I don't know, Mark. I'm surprised he didn't send aurors here to arrest me for kidnapping."

Cindy asked, "How could he? He kidnapped Harry, too. If I'm not mistaken, the legal procedure would've been taking him to the Ministry and letting them decide who his guardians would be."

"I can imagine who he'd have ended up with then," said Minerva. She shook her head. "Dumbledore is up to something. He must have known I'd recognize his writing." She sighed in resolution. "I'm afraid that I'll have to leave so I can have a talk with him to see what he wants."

"No, don't go, Aunt Minnie," said Brianna as everyone expressed similar sentiments.

"I'm afraid my mind is made up. This matter has to be settled. I, for one, do not wish to spend the rest of the holiday worried about this. I'll mirror you when I have news, and I'll return as soon as I can."

"I know how they like to maintain appearances, so I'll drive you to the airport," said Mark, shrugging his shoulders.

She turned to her brother's son. "No, that won't be necessary just this once. I don't want you to spend Christmas driving in Chicago. I shall apparate there. It's not illegal to do. Your government just doesn't want to attract the attention of muggles, so they prefer people traveling to and from the airport by muggle means. However, you only get in trouble if you do it more than twice per year. Happy Christmas, everyone."

She then left the room with everyone staring after her. Obviously trying to change the subject, Cindy asked, "What did Mr. Dumbledore give you, anyway?"

Harry looked at the shining, silvery cloth in his hands for a moment before saying, "It's some sort of cloak."

"Then, put it on," said Brianna eagerly. "I've never seen you wearing silver before."

“Alright,” he said, and wrapped it around his shoulders so that it covered everything but his head. Everyone gasped and just stared, causing him to look down at himself. What he saw horrified him. “My body’s gone!” he declared.

“It is not,” said Brianna as a huge grin formed on her face. “Didn’t you pay attention during the first Charms class at Wentworth where Mr. Connelly talks about how some advanced spells can be put on clothes to protect the wearer from most spells or to make her...”

“Invisible,” Harry said excitedly. “I’ve got an invisibility cloak!”

Brianna said; “You’d better not tell Aunt Minnie,” while looking first at Harry and then her parents. “She’d never let you keep it.”

“I don’t know if that’s such a good idea, either,” said Cindy, with a concerned expression on her face. “What do you do at Hogwarts that an invisibility cloak would help you with?”

Harry’s ears turned pink as he looked in his mom’s eyes. “Um, well, nothing.”

“Then why...” she started before her son interrupted her.

“But it would be nice to have – not use – something that belonged to my biological father with me.” He put on his most pathetic face.

“Yeah, right,” Cindy replied with a smirk. “Those puppy dog eyes stopped working years ago. I know exactly what you’ll want to use it for, so I’m afraid we won’t let you take it with you to school.” She then turned to her husband, who had thus far remained silent. He was staring in awe at where Harry’s body should be. “Isn’t that right, Mark?”

“Hmm. What was that, dear?” He used to just automatically agree with his wife when he wasn’t paying attention, but he’d learned his lesson when she’d tricked him into agreeing that he’d take her to the opera. She made him keep that promise and he endured two agonizing hours as punishment for pretending to pay attention.

“I was saying that we won’t let him take that cloak to school, Mark.”

He cleared his throat, and looked nervous as he said, "I don't know, dear. I've got a feeling that he'd somehow sneak it there, anyway. I don't think he'd get involved in too much..."

Cindy couldn't believe her ears. She rounded on her husband. "Mark, how can you say that?" she yelled. "What would you have done at that age with that cloak?"

"Um, well..." Seeing that their parents were not paying attention, Harry covered up his face and Brianna snuck under the cloak, too, and they walked to the kitchen, grabbed a platter full of Christmas cookies, and sneaked up the stairs.

-

"Happy Christmas, Minerva," said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes. He was wearing an outfit that made him look like a tall, thin Santa Claus. She had knocked on his door moments before. "How are you?"

"Happy Christmas, Albus. I'm doing well. How are you?"

"Just wonderful. Please, come in. May I take your coat?"

After that, Dumbledore offered, "Would you care for a Christmas biscuit? My elf, Blankey, just finished baking them. With the exception of kitchen duty, I've given her the day off, which is why I answered the door. It was quite considerate of you to pay an old man a visit on this fine holiday."

"I'm afraid that this isn't just a social call, as you well know, Albus," said Minerva as she was seated on his couch.

"Very well," he said nonchalantly. "It is fortunate that you came this late. You see, Severus was here and left a little while ago. I couldn't imagine his reaction to learning that the very boy responsible for his dismissal from Hogwarts' staff was the son of James Potter."

With a hint of a smile on her face, she said, "I'd imagine he wouldn't be too pleased. The way those two used to go at each other..." She

stopped her reminiscing to return to the present. "I'm surprised Aberforth isn't here today."

"He did stop by this morning with his gift, a bottle of wine that's almost as old as I am. He said that he had to keep the Hogs Head open today."

She sighed. "Very well. How did you find out about Harry?"

"It was actually quite simple," he said with a twinkle in his eyes. "In my search for the Boy-Who-Lived, I decided to revisit the Dursleys, who were quite happy to inform me of their encounter with young Harry last summer, at a zoo if I'm not mistaken." Under her breath, Minerva whispered an expletive she would've docked a student twenty points for uttering in her presence. The former headmaster seemed to have not heard, although his eyes twinkled a bit more than they had been. "I was able to look in their minds and immediately recognized both Harry and yourself. I also saw their reaction to him. You should have obliviated them, Minerva. By the way, I did just that before I left. They now have no idea whether Harry Potter is dead or alive."

"I see."

"I must say, Minerva, that you had me completely fooled all those years. I never even suspected you had anything to do with Harry's disappearance."

"I saw what kind of people the Dursleys were, and refused to subject him to them. I do not regret that decision, and will not allow him to be returned," she said firmly.

"I quite understand," he replied happily. "Taking him away from the family he grew up with would devastate that lad, and wouldn't accomplish much anyway. As safe as he would be with the blood wards I put at that house, I believe that he is even safer where no one knows where to find him, should they wish him harm. I believe that it is in the lad's best interests to keep him where he is."

"That's good," said Professor McGonagall, although she was confused.

"I must confess," Albus continued, "that I am a bit hurt that you didn't trust my judgment." She opened her mouth to speak, but he waved her off with his hand. "I know that you have demonstrated that sometimes my judgment is not the best, and in this case, I think it has worked out well. Judging by my encounters with the Dursleys, I do believe that Harry was happier with your family than he would've been with his blood relatives. He certainly seems well-adjusted, and a prodigy, if a bit stubborn."

"If that means that he demands that his teachers behave in a professional manner, then it is a trait that we share."

"I know," he said with his familiar eye-twinkle. "I do have one question for you, Minerva."

"Oh," she asked.

"What really happened last term with Professor Quirrel?"

-

Not long after, Albus Dumbledore relaxed in his favorite easy chair, having just bid a good evening to Headmistress McGonagall. He had been very intrigued by the method Harry had used to prevail against Quirrel and gave her his theory as to why the possessed professor couldn't bear to touch the Boy-Who-Lived.

As he reflected about his discussion with Minerva, his mind drifted back to his last meeting with the Dursleys.

Having apparated into a nearby alley, Dumbledore, dressed in a navy blue muggle suit, with his white hair and beard as long as ever, walked up to the door of Number Four Privet Drive and knocked. It was early November, and the former professor had not had any success yet in his search for Harry Potter. He'd decided that it couldn't hurt to interview the Dursleys again. They didn't remember the last time he'd been there, over a decade before, when he'd found out that they hadn't found Harry on their doorstep.

The door opened, revealing a scrawny woman with a long neck that Albus immediately recognized as Petunia Dursley. She was staring at his beard like it was something vile. "May I help you," she said curtly.

With a twinkle in his eye, he jovially replied, "I certainly hope so, Mrs. Dursley. I'm Albus Dumbledore. You may rem..."

"The head of that freak school," she hissed.

"Actually," he said, "I've retired from that position."

"If this is about my freak nephew, we meant what we said! He is not to come near us!"

The aged wizard's eyes bulged out at this news for about a second, which was the only physical reaction he'd had to this astonishing news. Before he could respond, a voice called out, "Petunia, who is that at the door?"

She replied, "A freak like the Potters!"

"Then slam the door in his face."

Dumbledore asked, "Did I understand you correctly, Mrs. Dursley, that you have met your nephew?"

"Yes, but I don't want to see him again!" She pulled on the door to close it, but Dumbledore stopped her as he performed Legilimency on the woman, making her relive her encounter with Harry Potter. He was astonished by what he'd discovered, and would have to think carefully about how to proceed, but he did know that it would be unwise to leave the Dursleys with that information. With lightning-quick speed, he pulled out his wand and silently stunned her. He caught her, walked into the house, and gently placed her on the floor.

"What are you doing to my wife, you freak?!" shouted Vernon, who was moving toward him in what could only be described as very slow running. It was quite easy for Dumbledore to stun him as well, making sure to levitate him to the chair he'd just left. He then levitated Petunia to the couch. At this moment, Dudley came down the stairs, having apparently been alerted by the noise that something was

amiss. Before he could speak, the wizard stunned and levitated him as well. While they were still unconscious, he obliterated each of them of their encounter with Harry, as well as the encounter with him. He enervated them just before popping away.

Dumbledore sighed as he considered what kind of life Harry would've had if he'd been left with that family. He'd never admit it, but he was actually grateful that Minerva had saved him from that grave mistake.

-

"He gave you an invisibility cloak?" repeated the bushy-haired girl from the mirror in Harry's hand. "I've never heard of anything so irresponsible...but then again, it is Dumbledore."

Harry chuckled at that statement, knowing that she, like him, didn't think very highly of the former headmaster's judgment. However, he did like his cloak and wanted to keep it. As soon as he and Brianna finished 'testing' the Christmas cookies to make sure they were up to their mum's normal high standards, she went to her room and he called his best friend. He was sitting at his desk. "It used to belong to my biological father."

Hermione's expression softened as she said, "I understand that it's important to you. I'm just saying that I can't believe Dumbledore would give it to you."

"He's probably trying to get on my good side now, since he apparently knows who I am. Remember, he said there was some sort of prophecy about me." When he saw his best friend frown, he decided to change the subject slightly. "Can you imagine how useful that cloak will be with our pranking?"

He saw a hint of a smile return to her face. "But I doubt you'll be able to bring it with you. I'm sure your aunt..."

"I don't think my aunt even glanced at the cloak. She was more concerned with the note," he interrupted happily.

"But your parents..."

"Are fighting about it now," he said with a grin. "I know I'll be able to keep it."

"How do you know that?" asked Hermione, looking rather skeptical.

"Because it's the only thing I have from my biological family. No matter how much my mom's against the cloak, she won't stop me from keeping it. She may want an unbreakable vow that I won't use the cloak for breaking school rules, but I'm..."

"She won't ask for an unbreakable vow. That would kill you!"

With a slight chuckle, Harry said, "I know. I was just exaggerating. I..."

At that moment, there was a knock on the door. A female voice called, "Harry, honey, may I come in?"

"It's my mom," said Harry to the mirror. "I've gotta go."

"Let me know how it turns out."

"Okay. Bye. Mirror, deactivate." He then turned toward the door. "Come in."

The door opened, and Cindy McGonagall was indeed standing behind it. She walked inside and sat on his bed, picking up the light cloak that was lying on it. She examined it with interest for about thirty seconds before speaking. "So, this used to belong to James Potter."

"That's what the note said," responded Harry noncommittally.

Sighing, she said, "That explains how he got away with the pranks Aunt Minnie said she could never prove he did."

"You're not going to tell her about the cloak, are you?" he asked, concerned.

"Your father asked me not to. He wants you to have the cloak. I'm not so sure about it."

"Mom, I," he pleaded.

"I know. If she knows about the cloak, she'll make sure you don't bring it back to Hogwarts. She'll probably personally search your trunk to make sure you didn't smuggle it."

"So I can bring it to school?" he asked excitedly.

She looked deep into his mischievous green eyes. "If we say no, will you try to sneak it to Hogwarts anyway?"

As much as he tried, he still couldn't stop his ears from turning pink under his mother's gaze. Before he spoke, she continued, "Don't bother answering, because I'd rather not be lied to."

"Um..."

"I told your father that you'd get into trouble with the cloak, and he said you already do. The cloak would only be an extra tool for you to use."

He lowered his gaze, not being able to stand the fact that he couldn't lie to his mother properly. He wondered if he should practice more. "Well, you see..."

"While I don't want you playing pranks with it, there's also the danger that seems to find you, not to mention the trouble at the school right now." She sighed. "I have to admit that I'm a bit uneasy sending you to Hogwarts with all that Chamber of Secrets business going on. Having the cloak might make you a bit safer."

She paused. "It might also inspire you to break the restrictions that have been put on you. I could try to make you promise not to use it for pranks, but by doing that, I know I'd turn you into a liar. I need you to at least promise me that you won't use it to place yourself in extra danger, going places where students aren't allowed."

He sighed, and looked into the woman's eyes and said, "I promise," without blinking.

"Alright," she said. "I'll take your word for it, and I'll be very disappointed in you if you break that promise." He nodded in

understanding. “Now, what will we tell Aunt Minnie when she asks what Dumbledore gave you?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Why not just say it was an old cloak?”

“She’d want to see it,” said Cindy. “I think it would be better to actually have something else to show her. I have just the thing. I’ll be right back.” She then left the room, leaving Harry wondering just what it was that she was bringing. She was back within five minutes holding something silver in her hands.

“What’s that?” he asked, curious.

She held it so that he would see that it was an old, but obviously taken care of, wristwatch. It was obviously expensive.

“It’s a watch my father used to wear before...before he died. I was planning on giving it to you on your next birthday, but I’ll give it to you now instead. We can say it belonged to your father instead of your grandfather when Aunt Minnie’s around. I don’t want you wearing it every day – only on occasions where you’d dress up.”

“What if I put an unbreakable charm on it?” he asked.

She smiled at her magical son. “Alright. Do that.”

He got his wand and performed that charm, and then decided to try a, “Reparo,” to take care of the few scratches. He was pleased to see that it now looked brand new. “Thanks, mom,” he said before getting up from his desk and hugging her. He knew that this gift meant a lot to her. When they separated, she got up from Harry’s bed.

“Aunt Minnie called us a few minutes ago and said that Mr. Dumbledore doesn’t intend on spilling the beans about you. He found out by talking to the Dursleys.” Harry had to stop himself from swearing in front of his mother. “She’ll be back before dinner. Why don’t you come down and collect the rest of your presents so the living room isn’t a mess anymore?” She turned to walk out of the room. It was then that Cindy noticed the empty platter on his desk. “Did you eat all the Christmas cookies?”

-

Minerva arrived back at the house just before Christmas dinner, and was impressed with Harry's new watch, and apparently didn't suspect a thing. The next week went by quickly, with Harry and Brianna 'testing' the Super Nintendo out as much as possible. Naturally, Harry had his now traditional Quidditch match with his American friends at Frank's Flying Funhouse. His team won, as usual.

Hermione was shocked that Harry's mom let him keep the Invisibility cloak, but he knew that she had a mischievous side. "She adopted me under Dumbledore's nose, didn't she?" Soon enough, Harry was back at Hogwarts, wondering if Malfoy had tried to cause trouble for his friends again, and wondering what they'd do to him this time. Thinking about that almost made Harry wish he'd ridden the train – almost. He did prefer to spend the extra time with his family, although he was anxious to see Hermione, *'and the others,'* he reminded himself, again.

-

The door to the Great Hall opened, alerting Harry that the other students had returned. He marked his place in the book he'd been reading and stuffed it in his book bag as he looked up. He saw a throng of kids aged eleven to eighteen all wearing black robes as they made their way toward the tables. His eyes searched from face to face until he finally spotted his best friend. He didn't notice the wide smile that automatically came on his face as his eyes met Hermione's.

She spotted him immediately (which wasn't hard since he was the only student sitting down) and his face brightened as she began quickly making her way toward him. Their eyes were locked until she was sitting next to him. "Hello, Harry!" she happily greeted him.

"Hi, Hermione. How was the train ride?"

"Entertaining," said Padma, who'd sat across from them.

"Oh?" asked Harry. "What did Malfoy do?"

"Nothing to us," said Hermione with a grin. "He didn't have time."

Now Harry's interest was peeked. "What happened?"

"The git, along with Crabbe and Goyle, was picking on that first-year Gryffindor, Colin Creevey, telling him that he'd be the next '*mudblood*' attacked. Colin punched him, and Ron Weasley and Neville walked by at the right moment and started fighting Crabbe and Goyle so they couldn't protect Malfoy," said Padma.

Luna, who'd just joined them, added, "I think the Plumcorts were affecting them."

Hermione stared at her for a moment, before saying, "Colin had Draco in a headlock when Penny found them fighting and broke it up. Unfortunately, Crabbe and Goyle were winning their fights."

Harry glanced at the Slytherin table to see that Draco was sporting a huge black eye on the left side of his face. Ron and Neville at the Gryffindor table had assorted bruises, but were otherwise fine. Colin didn't seem to have a scratch on him. Harry said, "I guess Draco didn't realize that kids learn how to fight a lot better in a muggle school than a mansion."

Hermione looked annoyed while the other girls giggled. Hermione said, "After that, all six boys were forced to sit in the same compartment with a few prefects for the rest of the trip. I think they all got detention and lost their houses some points."

"So," said Padma with a smirk, "Malfoy was unable to *grace us with his presence*. We were so disappointed."

Harry looked thoughtful for a moment before asking, "Draco actually told Colin he'd be the next victim?"

"Idle boasting," said Hermione with a scoff.

"What if it's not?" replied Harry.

"That pathetic little boy is not the Heir of Slytherin. He just wishes he were."

“How do we know?” asked Padma. “His family has been in Slytherin for ages.”

“They’re also part of the black thumb conspiracy,” added Luna.

“I just wish I could hear what they talk about in their common room,” commented Padma. “I’ll bet he brags about it to his mates in there.”

Harry’s eyes seemed to brighten as a wide smile appeared on his face. Hermione looked at his expression first in confusion and then horror. “We can go in there,” Harry declared.

-

A half-hour later, Harry, Hermione and Padma were under the invisibility cloak with their shoes charmed to be silent. They’d wanted to bring Luna with them, but couldn’t fit a fourth person, so she volunteered to watch out for nargles as she brought Harry’s book bag to the Ravenclaw dorm. The cloak had been in the bag, so all they’d had to do was leave the hall before Draco and slip into an unused classroom to pull it out. They had been following Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle for a few minutes, and were glad when the Slytherins paused by a stretch of bare, damp stone wall.

“Pure-blood!” said Malfoy proudly, and a stone door concealed in the wall slid open. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle marched through it and the Ravenclaw trio hurried behind them before it could close. The arrogant blond paused, sniffed the air, and announced happily, “Much better. No mudblood’s ever been in here.” His two stooges laughed while Hermione grinned at her companions from under the cloak. It was hard not to laugh at how stupid bigots were. Apparently, his black eye hadn’t taught him a lesson.

Harry couldn’t help but look around at the long, low underground room with rough stone walls and ceiling from which round, greenish lamps were hanging on chains. He noticed a fire was crackling under an elaborately carved mantelpiece ahead of them. He also saw the door that led to the special potions room he’d seen memories of at Snape’s trial. There were several older couples kissing on different pieces of furniture, and Harry was happy to note that, contrary to the

image Malfoy presented, nobody older than him even noticed the braggart arrive, strutting as though something was shoved up his...

The Boy-who-lived was pulled out of his observations when he heard Goyle ask softly, "Did ya mean what ya said 'bout that Cravy mudblood bein' next?"

"How should I know, Goyle?" he hissed back. "I already told you that I don't know who the heir is."

"We jus' thought ya might, seein' that ya said who'd be next," said Crabbe.

"Well, I don't. Father just told me he was here, and that I should keep my head down so he can get on with it. I just said that because I still can't believe that mudbloods are allowed here." He sat down on an easy chair as he looked at his companions. "If I really had my choice, the next mudblood attacked would be Granger, and she wouldn't be petrified. She'd be killed."

Harry's face turned red and he looked ready to murder. Padma put a hand over his mouth while Hermione held his wrists to prevent him from doing anything rash – like throw off the cloak and pound Malfoy's face into the floor. He took a deep, silent breath and nodded, signaling the girls that he'd calmed down. One of the kissing couples got up and walked toward the door, hand in hand. Harry had an idea of where they were going and what they'd be doing. He used to think that was completely gross, but now he wasn't so sure. He felt Hermione's hand push him slightly, and realized that the girls wanted to follow that couple out the door. Seeing no reason to stay there now that they knew Draco wasn't the Heir of Slytherin, he complied and they made it to the Ravenclaw common room with no problems.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Many things are different in this story, including that Draco and his buddies went home for Christmas, unlike in CoS. I think they stayed at Hogwarts in the book just so they'd be there to see Hermione's corpse when she got attacked. However, in this story, Hermione

wasn't staying behind, so the Slytherins didn't have a reason to, either.

Sorry it's such a short chapter, but I felt that this was a natural breaking point.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 19 – Suspicions

Although Harry hadn't attacked Malfoy in the Slytherin common room, that didn't stop him from being angry and glaring at the Death Nibbler every time he saw him. When Draco noticed this, he glared back, but didn't do anything to him.

“That coward doesn’t have the guts to say what he thinks to our faces,” Harry muttered after Draco and his goons walked off to class after they’d traded glares.

"Of course not," said Hermione. "He knows you'd kill him."

“Creevey taught him how easy it is for anyone to beat him up,” added Padma. “Too bad his black eye healed,” she added. “He looked much better with it.”

"In any case, Harry," said Hermione, "You've got to drop it. Stop glaring at him."

“But he said...”

“He said he’s not the Heir of Slytherin. He’s just a pathetic little boy who can’t keep his mouth shut,” interrupted Hermione, “and is not worth our interest.”

“Fine,” Harry agreed, and resolved not to glare at Draco anymore while Hermione was watching.

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HP-HP-HP-HP-HP-HP

The next month went by quickly, and January turned into February. On the first of the month, right after one of their study group meetings, Ginny, who had seemed back to normal after the holidays, said, "Don't forget about our bet this Saturday, Harry."

He grinned at her. "Don't worry. I'll be ready to take those five knuts from you after I catch the Snitch."

She defiantly looked him in the eyes. “In your dreams, McGonagall. I’ll expect full payment before I go to the party in Gryffindor tower after I catch the Snitch.”

"I agree," said Harry with a slight grin. "If you catch the Snitch, it will be in *your* dreams."

“We’ll see about that,” she said smugly before turning around and leaving Harry with Hermione and Padma, who were working on homework, in C.A.R.E. headquarters. Harry chuckled to himself and pulled out his Game Boy.

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HP-HP-HP-HP-HP-HP

Harry worked exceptionally hard during the Quidditch practices that week because he really wanted to prove he was the better Seeker. It wasn't a grudge match – he was friends with Ginny and that would stay the same no matter who got the Snitch – but he just wanted to win and knew that she did, too. Neither one of them was going to be easy on the other during the game, and he was actually looking forward to the match.

On the day before the game, Michelle, the Ravenclaw captain, asked him to stay for a minute after practice, so Harry had Hermione leave without him.

“Harry,” the seventh-year girl said. “You’ve been really working hard this week.”

He blushed at her praise. "I just really want to win tomorrow's game."

"I heard a rumor that you've got a bet going with the other Seeker," she said with a smirk.

He swallowed as his ears turned pink. “Um, well...”

“...and that you made the bet before either of you were on the teams. Harry,” she said, sounding amused, “I’d hate for you to lose the bet, so make sure you don’t.”

“I will,” he promised.

“Good. Now, get changed so I can *escort* you to the common room to make sure you don’t attack all the muggle-borns on the way. Then you can get a good night’s sleep tonight because I want you ready to catch the Snitch tomorrow.” Harry obeyed, but had to admit that he was getting sick of the restrictions placed on him.

“Aye, aye, captain,” he said with a mock salute as he turned toward the changing room. He heard Michelle chuckle as he entered.

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HP-HP-HP-HP-HP-HP

Harry reentered the castle, with Michelle about ten feet behind him because she liked to give him his privacy as well and figured that she wasn't disobeying the rules as long as she could see him. He soon noticed Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle in the hallway.

“McGonagall,” Draco sneered, “I’m surprised to see you walking anywhere without your filthy mudblood.”

Gritting his teeth was Harry's only physical reaction to the bigot, even though he was already mad at him. He continued walking.

“I’m talking to you, you son-of-a-squib!” Anyone looking in Harry’s eyes at that moment could tell that he was not in a mood to be trifled with. However, Draco ran up behind him and grabbed his left shoulder from behind to turn him around while his bodyguards were trying to catch up. “You’d better learn to respect your sup…”

BAM! At that moment, Harry lost his temper completely, for the first time in years. He clenched his fists and turned around, ramming his right fist into Draco's nose. There was a cracking noise as his head snapped back. Harry couldn't help but feel satisfaction as blood began flowing freely down as Draco's eyes filled with tears. "You hit me," he mumbled.

“Harry, stop!” yelled Michelle, who was now running toward them.

“And I’ll hit you again,” growled Harry, ignoring Michelle as his left fist made contact with the arrogant brat’s stomach. Draco gasped for breath as Harry rammed into him, wrestling his helpless, crying opponent to the ground. He began punching Draco’s already bloody face in. He was sick of that idiot’s constant belittling of people simply because his parents were evil wizards, and wanted to teach him a lesson he wouldn’t soon forget.

Crabbe and Goyle had finally caught up, but were stopped from grabbing Harry from behind by Michelle while she was screaming for Harry to stop.

Suddenly, a small but authoritative voice shouted, “Stop! All of you!”

Everyone stopped at Professor Flitwick’s command. Goyle immediately declared, “McGonagall here attacked Draco for no reason.” Crabbe nodded in agreement.

“Is this true, Miss Hamilton?” he asked Michelle.

“Malfoy was trying to provoke him, and grabbed his shoulder, but, er, well...Harry did actually attack first,” she admitted with her head down. Harry could tell she didn’t like saying it, but she was telling the truth.

“Mr. McGonagall, what do you have to say for yourself?”

Harry got up, his rage forgotten as he straightened himself out. He cringed as he noticed Draco’s blood on his clothes and hands. He glanced down at his crying opponent. Malfoy’s nose was obviously broken and bent at a strange angle and he had two black eyes. His cheeks were cut and bruised. “Um, you know how he is, professor. He was...”

“Did you throw the first punch?” demanded Flitwick, looking him straight in the eyes.

Harry didn’t feel a legilimency probe, but still knew that his head of house could easily guess what had happened. He’d truly lost his temper. That didn’t happen often, but it had now. Harry realized that he’d wanted an excuse to beat Draco to a pulp ever since he’d

wished Hermione dead. He hung his head down. "I did, sir," he admitted.

The petite professor seemed to sigh in relief. Harry supposed that he was relieved that he didn't have to call his pupil a liar. "Very well. Fifty points from Ravenclaw, and five detentions. You will also not be allowed to participate in tomorrow's Quidditch game." Harry heard the gasp behind him and finally noticed his captain looking at him in disappointment. "Fighting, be it magical or muggle dueling, is not tolerated in this school. I'm very disappointed in you, and I'm sure the headmistress will be as well. Return to the common room. I'll let you know when you will be serving your detentions later today." Harry noticed the grins on Crabbe and Goyle's faces while Flitwick levitated Malfoy toward the hospital wing.

Harry had taken two steps when he heard Michelle yell at him. “Harry, how could you get into a fight the day before a game!? I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU!! I thought you cared about our team!” Keeping his head down, he listened to his captain berating him, knowing that he deserved it. Even so, he had to admit that he’d enjoyed bashing Malfoy’s head into the floor. “Are you even listening to me?”

Harry looked up at his red-faced captain. She looked scary. “Of course I am, Michelle.” He took a deep breath. “You’re right; I messed up, big time. I’m sorry.”

“Good,” she said, her expression grim, “Because if you ever do something like this again, I’ll have to kick you off the team.”

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It was a subdued Harry that entered the Ravenclaw common room after giving ‘Al’ the password. Michelle was right behind him, and called out, “All members of the Quidditch team, I need to talk to you, now.”

Most of them were in the room, and the few that weren't were quickly located. "Harry," said Hermione before Michelle started talking. She was looking at her best friend's appearance with a concerned expression. "What happened?"

He sighed. "I..."

"That's what this meeting is about," interrupted Michelle. "Mr. McGonagall decided that he enjoyed muggle dueling more than Quidditch. He got in a fight and now he's not allowed to play in tomorrow's game. Chang, you'll be Seeker."

Cho blinked in surprise. "Er, sure. That's fine."

"Who'd you fight?" asked one member, while another asked, "Did you win?" Hermione was just staring at her best friend in shock.

The captain sighed. "Fine, if you must know, he beat the crap out of the Malfoy boy, but that's not the point."

"That stinking Slytherin. Good one, Harry!" said Sean Bradley, one of the Chasers.

"That was not a *good one!*" said Hermione, glaring at Harry.

"It most certainly was not!" agreed Michelle. "I've already told him that if anything like this happens again, he'll be off the team." She looked at the others. "That goes for all of you." She turned to the reserve Seeker. "Chang, I'm sure you'll do a fine job. Now, everyone make sure to get a good night sleep." She got up and walked away without sparing a glance at Harry. The others left Harry and Hermione alone after either scolding or congratulating Harry for his fight.

"So, that's Draco's blood on you?" she asked after a moment. He nodded grimly. "What happened?"

"I ran across him on the way back from practice. He started going on about mudbloods and squibs."

"You shouldn't pay attention to that rubbish!" she declared in her most bossy voice. "You know better than that."

"I know, and I did ignore him. I walked right past them, but then he chased after me and grabbed my shoulder. I spun around and punched him. I think I broke his nose."

"I see," she said. "That's when you were caught?"

He put his head down. "Um, not quite. You see, I was really mad and I sort of punched him again and tackled him to the ground and started, well, beating on him..."

"How could you?" she asked, appalled at her friend's use of violence.

"I lost my temper," he snapped, causing Hermione to flinch. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I didn't mean to snap at you. I just lost control. I don't know why. I just couldn't stop. I..."

"This isn't about whatever he said today, Harry, and we both know it." Hermione sighed. "It's about what he said last month. Don't deny it. Both Padma and I have noticed how you've been glaring at each other since then. You've wanted to do this for awhile."

"Hermione, I..."

"I understand. It's part of the male philosophy. I just hope you've gotten it out of your system, now."

"I have," he said with a small grin.

"Good. Did you get any other punishments than being banned from the game?"

"Of course. It was Flitwick that caught me. He wasn't happy. He took fifty points and said I'm gonna get five detentions."

"Wow. That does seem a bit harsh."

"He did have to levitate Malfoy to the hospital wing. He was crying the whole way," Harry said as a grin began to form on his lips.

"You're impossible," said Hermione, as she was quite obviously trying to avoid laughing at the Slytherin's expense. "At least one good thing came of this."

"What's that?" he asked, confused.

Hermione said, "I noticed that you're not blushing around our captain now," with a smirk.

At that point, Padma approached them and asked what had happened. She was more amused at the idea of Malfoy crying the whole way to the hospital wing than anything else. It didn't escape her notice that Harry had no injuries from the 'fight.'

He'd just changed out of his robes when the door opened, revealing a very upset headmistress. Her lips were thinner than he'd ever seen them. Harry gulped.

"Mr. McGonagall," she said, her voice deceptively calm, "come with me."

With one last helpless glance at his friends, Harry got up and walked toward his aunt. They went on in silence until they reached an unused classroom. She put silencing charms around them before rounding on her great-nephew. "Harry, how could you!?"

"Aunt Minnie, I..."

"Are you trying to make people think you're the Heir of Slytherin? There are already people who suspect you, and now you violently assault that pampered prat! Perhaps you've forgotten, but his father is on the board of governors."

"Wouldn't fighting him prove the opposite; that I can't stand purebloods who..."

"Silence. Draco Malfoy suffered a broken nose, a cracked rib, and numerous bruises while you weren't hurt at all. This is just what certain people need to prove that you are a danger to the school. I don't care what that idiot said to you. This is inexcusable!"

Harry put his head down. "Yes, ma'am."

"Now, I am going to tell your parents and I can promise you that your mother won't be very pleased with you, either."

Harry looked alarmed. "No, you don't have to tell mom. I..."

"It's standard procedure to keep parents informed of major rule infractions, such as this, Harry. I'd have to tell them even if I didn't want to." She then took a deep breath. "Harry, I know what Draco is, and unofficially agree that he does deserve to be beaten up, but you've got to learn to control your temper." She grinned. "Violence doesn't solve anything. I thought you were taught to prank people who deserve it in such a way that you don't get caught. Brawling doesn't discourage bad behavior nearly as much as public humiliation."

Grinning, Harry said, "But he was humiliated. He was crying like a baby while being rescued by a half-blood." He snorted softly. "I proved that a muggle could easily get the best of him."

“Be that as it may,” Aunt Minnie said, once more looking stern, “your punishment stands. I shall do my best to defend this fight as boys-being-boys, and try to make Lucius look like an idiot for getting involved.” Harry chuckled. “I suggest you return to your dormitory and think about how to better manage your anger during your detentions. I would expect your parents will call you later tonight.”

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Minerva was right; Harry's mom did call him on the mirror, and was very displeased with him. When he later talked to his sister, Brianna, she was glad Harry had beaten up Draco but disappointed he wouldn't be playing in the next day's game. She also mentioned that Jeremy Lightfellow had finished his jail sentence for cheating at the American baseball games and had started working at a shop in Little Salem where his family had seen him. He said he was now staying far away from muggle sports.

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The next day, while Harry was diligently cleaning the Charms classroom for Professor Flitwick, Hermione and most of the school were watching the Quidditch match between Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. The Ravenclaw head of house had decided that Harry

would serve his detentions cleaning that classroom every Saturday until the five detentions were up.

“And Roger Davies has just gotten another lucky shot past Wood, making the score 100 to 40, in favor of Ravenclaw!” announced Lee Jordan, who was sitting next to Headmistress McGonagall.

Hermione, who was in uniform on the sidelines while watching the starting team play, muttered to another reserve player, “Why does that Gryffindor get to announce all the games? He’s clearly biased for his own house, and that was not a lucky shot. Davies is simply a better Chaser than Wood is a Keeper.”

Before any response could be made, Lee announced, "It looks like Ginny Weasley has seen the Snitch, or else it's another feint. She's darting toward the other side of the pitch with a determined expression. I think she's really seen it. Chang must agree with me, because she's hot on Weasley's trail. Weasley is reaching out her hand; so is Chang. What? Weasley dives straight down about ten feet and grabs something while Chang is looking around. Does she? Yes! Ginny Weasley has caught the Snitch! Gryffindor wins 190 to 100!"

Hermione muttered, "Harry would've gotten it," while the Gryffindor team began celebrating.

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HP-HP-HP-HP-HP-HP

Harry arrived back at his common room to a depressed crowd of people, some of whom began glaring at him. He'd been escorted by Professor Flitwick, who simply left him at the door.

He swallowed lightly and walked up to Hermione and Padma. "So, um, I take it the game didn't go so well."

“Oh, our Chasers, Beaters and Keeper were at the top of their game,” she said blandly.

"I take it Ginny got the Snitch, then?"

Padma said, "That stupid Cho followed Ginny around instead of looking for the Snitch. If you hadn't..."

"I'm sorry I'm not a good enough Seeker!" said Cho, who had been nearby and obviously overheard their conversation. She burst into tears and ran downstairs to her dorm. Padma paled.

"Good going," commented Harry.

"Sorry," she said.

"Tell Cho that," said Hermione, "not us."

"I will," she replied. Her face suddenly got mischievous. "But first, I found out the full name of Madam Grubbly's fiancé."

"Was he at the game?" asked Harry.

"Yes, Casper Plank was there, sitting next to her and holding her hand."

"Casper?" repeated Harry. "You mean like the ghost?"

"What ghost?" asked Padma. "Is that one of the Hogwarts ghost's names?"

"No," said Hermione with a small smile. "He's a character from a muggle cartoon on the tele."

"Oh," she replied. Harry knew that they'd previously told their pureblood friend about television, although he didn't think he'd ever get used to the TV being referred to as the tele.

"I wonder when they're going to get married," Hermione said.

"I hope it's soon," Padma replied dreamily. "I wonder what they'll wear."

Feeling a bit uncomfortable with the 'girl talk' that was beginning, Harry got up and announced, "I'm gonna go to headquarters." He figured that a few hours with his Game Boy would cheer him up.

"I'll escort you," said Hermione, reminding him of his restriction. "I'll do some reading."

[illegible]

Harry soon found himself deeply immersed in a game – Hermione was immersed in a book – when the door to Hagrid’s old hut opened. He paused his small entertainment system and looked up to see Ginny Weasley looking at him. In her hand was the same book that she’d had with her so frequently. Harry believed that it was a diary. She looked cheerful, but a bit surprised to see him.

“Hi, Ginny,” said Hermione. “Could you watch Harry and make sure he doesn’t attack all the students?” she asked sarcastically. “I have got to get to the library.”

“Sure,” replied Ginny with a grin, and Hermione marked her place in the book she was reading and headed toward the door.

When the door closed, Harry said, “Hi, Ginny. I guess I owe you five knuts.”

"That's right," she said with a smile.

“Too bad I got in that fight yesterday. Things would’ve turned out differently, but that’s the way it is.”

Her expression hardened a bit. "So, you think that if you'd been Seeker that Gryffindor would've lost."

He grinned while he reached into his pocket. "Of course, but our bet wasn't about who was playing, so you won fair and square." Seeing her anger at being told that he would've beaten her gave Harry an idea of how he could keep his money. "I know that I'll beat you in the final game, assuming Gryffindor makes it there."

“You mean, assuming Ravenclaw gets there,” she corrected him. “Gryffindor is now ahead of all the houses, including yours. Now, if it were a contest of who spends the most time in the library, I’m sure Ravenclaw would win. But this is Quidditch...”

“Where we’re gonna kick Slytherin’s butt in April and then slaughter Gryffindor in the June.”

“Care to put your money where your mouth is?” she asked confidently.

“Another wager,” he commented with a smile. “Sure.”

"Then double or nothing. Gryffindor will get the cup."

"You're on. That cup will look good in Flitwick's office."

“Too bad it won’t get there,” she said, reaching out her hand to shake Harry’s.

He took her hand and they shook. Harry asked, "If somehow it's neither team, then what?"

“Then, you owe me the original five knuts,” she said before walking over to the boom box and starting some music. “You don’t mind a little background music, do you?”

"No," he answered, while unpausing his game. Ginny sat down at the other table and started happily writing in her diary. He found it a bit strange that at times she'd react to what she was writing as though she were surprised, amused, or even upset, but didn't comment on it.

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About a week later, Harry woke up a half-hour before he normally would. The reason for this was that his name was being called out by a female voice that was very familiar to him. He picked up his glasses and then grabbed the mirror he had been keeping on his nightstand every evening since his aunt had told him to call her if he heard the strange, murderous voice that had led him to the Chamber of Secrets victims.

"What is it, Brianna?" he asked groggily.

“My, my, aren’t you a grouch this morning?” she said with a smirk.

“Why are you calling, now, anyway? Isn’t it like twelve thirty a.m. at home?”

“Incredible. You can actually do math in the morning. You truly are talented.”

“Ha, ha. What is it?”

“I just wanted to be the first to wish you a Happy Valentine’s Day, and find out what you’re giving Hermione.”

Harry tried his best to keep his cheeks from turning pink, but to no avail. “For your information, I am giving Hermione, as well as my other female *friends* like Padma, a *friendship* Valentine like I did last year,” he hissed angrily as he left the room, hoping that his dorm mates hadn’t already been woken up. “And I’m sure she’ll probably do the same for me. Of course, I’m sure Bobby will send you a dozen roses...”

“Shut up, Harry.”

“...and serenade you. He’ll probably show up anytime now and throw a rock at your window...”

“Be quiet!”

“...but it’ll break mom and dad’s window by mistake, and then he’ll sing Weird Al’s song, ‘*One More Minute*’ for all the neighbors to hear.” Harry was, of course, referring to a song that expressed deep loathing instead of love.

“He will not!” she screamed.

“Oh? What song does he sing to you?”

“Goodbye!” Brianna exclaimed. “I’ll bet Hermione sends you a *romantic* valentine.”

Before Harry could respond, his little sister had deactivated her mirror, having successfully woken him up early. He stood up from the chair

he'd occupied, deciding to shower early since he wouldn't be able to go back to sleep.

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HP-HP-HP-HP-HP

Figure 7 shows the results of the simulation model.

Harry was reading one of his textbooks in the common room when Hermione came up from her dorm. She smiled and walked straight to him. For some reason, Harry felt a bit nervous about what Brianna had suggested, although he'd never admit it to his annoying sister.

“Um, Happy Valentine’s Day,” he decided to say when she approached him. He was surprised that her ears turned pink. He didn’t notice that his did the same.

“Oh, er, same to you, Harry,” she replied while examining her shoes. “Should we, er, go to breakfast?”

“Okay.”

Together, they made their way to the Great Hall and sat down across from each other. Wordlessly, Harry began scooping scrambled eggs and bacon onto his plate. He was halfway through his meal when Hermione's owl, Rowena, landed in front of him with a muggle-style envelope. She held out her leg and Harry took the letter. As he did so, he noticed Hermione looking at him while failing to notice a small box that had fallen when he untied the letter. When she noticed him looking at her, her cheeks turned pink and she looked straight down at her plate. He suddenly felt nervous about opening the envelope. However, he knew that he couldn't put it off forever, so he gave the owl a piece of bacon so she would fly away, and pulled a muggle card out of the envelope.

The front of the card had a picture of a cat and dog that each had part of a glove in their mouths like they were playing tug-of-war with it, except that they'd gotten it to the point where their mouths were touching. Harry felt himself blush as he opened the card. Printed inside was the message:

'The best friendships can't be explained.'

Happy Valentine's Day!

Written in Hermione's familiar neat script was:

'I can't tell you how much your friendship means to me, Harry. You are truly the most important person in the world to me, and I don't know what I'd do without you.'

Love from, Hermione'

He looked up at his best friend, who was once again staring at him, and smiled. "Thanks, Hermione. You mean a lot to me, too." At that moment, Hedwig flew in with a scroll tied to her leg. "It's about time, girl." Hedwig glared at him before hooting indignantly, turning her back toward him and lifting her leg toward Hermione. Harry had sent his other valentines with a school owl, but somehow felt that the one for his best friend should be brought by Hedwig. He'd informed his owl that she was delivering the most important one. He'd never be able to explain why he didn't like the idea of Hedwig flying to Hermione with half-a-dozen scrolls and treating her as the first of many deliveries.

"Thank you, Hedwig," Harry's best friend said before untying the scroll and giving her a piece of bacon. She unrolled Harry's magical Valentine. It had a wizarding photo of an owl and a kitten. The feline had a ball of string while the bird had the end of that string in its claw. They would move around the parchment playing their little game. It said:

'We've talked a lot, laughed a lot, and shared a lot. I'm so glad I have a friend like you in my life.'

Happy Valentine's Day!

Harry's message was:

'The above message says it all a lot better than I could. You are a great friend – my best friend, Hermione.'

Harry'

"Thanks," said Hermione, smiling at him.

However, Harry wasn't smiling. While she was reading her valentine from him, he'd found a small wrapped package on the table that had his name on it written in Hermione's handwriting. He opened it to find a small box of chocolate mints. He was touched that she'd given him something, but more than that, he was upset with himself for not getting her anything. He racked his brain to try to think of something to give her.

"Oh," said Harry with a forced smile. "Thanks for this present. Um, I...forgot to bring your present to the owlry when I gave the scroll to Hedwig. I'll get it to you later."

She looked concerned. "Harry, it's alright if you didn't get me a present..."

"Of course I did," he interrupted. "You're my best friend. I wouldn't be like that." He looked around, trying to change the subject. "Madam Grubbly isn't here."

Hermione glanced at the staff table. "You're right." She grinned. "I'll bet she's spending Valentine's Day with Mr. Plank."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Either that or she's sick."

"Harry," she said a bit sharply, "that's not very nice."

"I wasn't wishing she was ill. I just said it's a possible explanation."

"Sorry," replied Hermione. "Anyway, like I said, it's alright if you don't have a gift for me."

"But I do," he lied, "and you'll have it at the end of the day."

"Alright. I think right now, though, we've got to get to Quidditch practice," she replied, reminding him that Michelle had started having Sunday morning practices in addition to the Saturday practices because he was in detention for the next three Saturdays.

"Yeah," Harry agreed, hoping he could think of something soon.

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Despite Padma's apology for what she'd said, Cho Chang had seemed a bit depressed since Ginny had beaten her in their last game. Michelle had managed to talk her out of quitting the reserve team, but her behavior was a bit strange. She'd act depressed and uninterested until their practice game began, and then she'd concentrate more than she ever had before. Harry noticed that she was marking him a lot less than she used to in practices, and had actually improved. He was still better, and beat her to the Snitch more often than not, but she was making it more of a challenge.

Because of this, not to mention that she was able to go to the Saturday practices while he was in detention, he had to concentrate too much on Quidditch to think of a gift for Hermione. All the girls on the team had thanked him for the ‘friend’ valentines he’d sent them with a school owl, and Hermione noted happily that hers was of higher value than the ones he’d given the others.

When they'd gotten back to the common room, Penelope, Padma and Luna also thanked him for their valentines. Luna commented, "My daddy also sent me a valentine, but his also had a gift – a bouquet of dandelions. They keep the Jervonians away."

To Harry's astonishment, he saw that she was indeed holding a jar with at least two dozen yellow dandelions. He wasn't sure where her father had found them in February, but he supposed that it had been a mild winter and a few wildflowers were already growing in the forest near headquarters. That gave him an idea. "That's great, Luna," he said. "I've got to go. Um, since I can't be alone, Luna, could you come with me?"

“Of course, Harry. I’ll protect you from the nargles.”

They hurried out of Ravenclaw tower and to Professor Sprout's office, where he got her to give him a vase. They then went outside the school, quickly making their way toward C.A.R.E. headquarters. When they were near Hagrid's old hut, Harry said, "Hermione gave me a small gift for Valentine's Day, and, um, I didn't get her anything. I thought I'd pick some flowers out of the forest for her."

Professor Flitwick was sitting at his desk grading parchments, glancing up at Harry every few minutes to make sure he was working. During his first week, he'd asked why he couldn't just *scourgify* the floor. Professor Flitwick had informed him that this was supposed to be punishment to discourage '*brawling like a muggle*' not Charms practice. Harry would never admit to anyone that he was pleased to find out that he had indeed broken Malfoy's nose, and was further pleased that Draco had not said one word to him since the 'fight.' He had to admit that he at least respected the fact that his head of house wasn't claiming that magic didn't clean as good as elbow grease, which Filch had always asserted.

Harry had switched to the mop and was half-way done with the floor when he heard a voice he'd hoped never to hear again.

"Let me rip you! Let me kill this time!"

Harry dropped the mop in surprise.

"Mr. McGonagall, is there something wrong?" asked Flitwick, who'd obviously heard the mop hit the floor.

"Yes. I need to call my aunt," he answered, pulling the little mirror out of his pocket. "Minerva McGonagall."

A few seconds later, his aunt's image appeared on his mirror as the background noise of clapping and booing came through the mirror. "Yes, Harry. You're supposed to be in detention."

"I am," he said, "but that thing we discussed before just happened."

Her image paled slightly. "You mean you heard..."

"Exactly," he interrupted. He didn't want Flitwick to know about the voice he was hearing.

"I'll be right there."

"What about the game?" Harry asked.

“It’s over. Higgs from Slytherin just caught the Snitch as you called. They just managed to win – 180 to 170. Madam Hooch was actually giving penalties to Slytherins. I’m glad we had our little talk.” She then shook her head. “Anyway, that’s enough chit chat. I’ll be at the Charms classroom in a minute, so stay there with Professor Flitwick.”

[illegible]

True to her word, the door was hoisted open by the headmistress exactly sixty seconds after their call ended. “Harry, come with me.” She looked to Flitwick. “He’ll continue his detention in a few minutes, Filius, if that’s alright.”

“Actually, Minerva,” the teacher replied, “He’s done enough today. His detentions are officially over.”

Harry said, "Thanks," and walked out of the room toward his aunt. "Can you still hear it?" she asked, once no one could overhear.

“Not right now, but I did just before you came. It was coming from this direction.” He walked quickly, but his aunt managed to keep up.

“Die!”

"I hear it again. This way!" He went down a flight of stairs and they continued following until they came across the prone form of Alicia Spinnet, a muggle-born girl on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. She was holding a compact and had obviously been in the process of checking her make-up when for some unknown reason she fell backwards, petrified like the others. She was near the library entrance.

“Anozzer victim – and Mizter McGonagall is at zee scene yet again,” came a voice from behind them.

Aunt Minnie turned toward her Potions teacher with a furious expression. “For your information, Professor LaVelle, Harry has been in detention with Professor Flitwick since breakfast, and I have just picked him up from there. He has not been alone all morning so it would have not been possible for him to have done this.”

Harry noticed that the Potions mistress looked frightened. "Professor, may I ask what you're doing here?"

"Harry!" scolded Minerva. She then looked back at the teacher. "I do wonder why you're so determined to pin this on my nephew, Sharon."

Harry could swear he saw a flicker of fear in her eyes as she said, "I, I'm not. It's jutz that I zaw him pointing hiz wand at zat cat..."

"Which has already been explained," said Minerva pointedly.

Professor LaVelle seemed to wither for a moment before saying, "I've got to go. I have a potion that needz tending." She then turned around and left quickly.

Without a word, Aunt Minnie pointed her wand at Alicia and began to levitate her to the hospital wing, with Harry walking behind her.

"Harry," she said as they were walking, "the staff and I have discussed what would happen if there were another attack. The other students will be informed soon, but there's no reason not to tell you now."

"Okay," he said, not knowing how to respond.

"Quidditch will be cancelled and a new curfew will be placed. After dinner, students will be escorted to either their common rooms or the library. Two hours later, the students in the library will be escorted to their common rooms."

"What about headquarters?" he asked.

"On Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons I will be willing to escort members of C.A.R.E. to your cabin and return to escort you to dinner, provided that you agree to stay there until I return. Similarly, members of other clubs will have that same privilege on those days."

"At least we can keep our study group."

"Also, all students will be escorted to and from their classes by a professor."

"It sounds like everybody's being watched like me, now," said Harry grimly.

"I'm afraid so," she said. "If there is another attack, I'll have no choice but to close the school."

"Really?" asked Harry. "That would be awful."

"Yes. Lucius Malfoy has been trying to convince the board that these attacks are my fault. One of my friends on the board of governors has told me that he wants me removed as headmistress."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "I know that he has something to do with this. Remember what his house elf was..." Harry grinned. "How about if we keep him otherwise occupied?"

"What do you mean?" asked Minerva, stopping to look at her nephew's evil grin.

"Anyone who saw poor Tribly can see that Mr. Malfoy is disobeying the law. He beats her badly. If he were busy dealing with Ministry charges of house-elf abuse, he wouldn't have time to get you sacked."

"A stain like that on his reputation might even get him taken off the board of governors," Aunt Minnie added with a grin.

"If you'll escort me to the owlry once we drop off Alicia, we can send an anonymous tip."

"That sounds like an excellent suggestion," she agreed.

"Also, if you'll escort me to Ravenclaw Tower, Hermione, Padma and I all have a new Animagus paper to give you."

"Excellent." She smiled at him. "I'm really proud of how seriously you're taking my offer. You're more than three-quarters through that book already."

He grinned. "We're highly motivated in this matter."

The only question is whether the Ministry will actually enforce this law that was passed as a result of the group known as C.A.R.E. (Community Advancing the Rights of Elves) that formed about a year-and-a-half ago at Hogwarts. For more on C.A.R.E., see page five.'

"That's great!" exclaimed Brianna. "He should be quite busily bribing bigoted buffoons as we speak."

Harry smiled at his sister's tongue twister before saying, "Yeah, I guess so. Hopefully, he will have to pay some penalty for what he's done to elves. The main thing is that while he's busy dealing with that, he hopefully won't have time to try getting Aunt Minnie sacked."

"I hope so," she replied. "What did they say about C.A.R.E. on page five?"

"Oh, just a reprint of the article Mrs. Brocklehurst wrote last year. We have gotten some more members already since the paper came out this morning."

"That's good," said Brianna.

"Did you like my present?"

She made a face. "I do like the self-inking quills, but not the note you put in it."

With an innocent expression, Harry asked, "Why ever not?"

"I'm NOT going to use them to write love-letters to Bobby!"

"I guess," said Harry, "you only use muggle pens for that."

"What do you use for love-letters to Hermione?" she asked, causing him to blush.

"I don't write love-letters," said Harry.

"Where is Hermione, anyway?" Brianna asked.

"Oh, she's at the library, but should be back any minute. She told me to wish you a happy birthday."

“Indeed I did,” the brunette in question said over Harry’s shoulder, surprising him. “Happy birthday, Brianna.”

“Thanks, Hermione,” Brianna replied. “I guess you’ll want to talk to Harry now, huh.” The girl winked, causing both Hermione and Harry to blush.

“Actually, I do need to talk to Harry, but it’s not about...”

“I understand. Bye,” she said, grinning. The mirror deactivated.

“What is it that you wanted to talk about?” asked Harry as he put the mirror in his pocket.

“Two things, actually,” she said. “First of all, have you noticed how Ginny Weasley gets after every attack?”

His eyes narrowed. “Well, she gets really withdrawn for a few days. I guess she’s scared.”

“I’m not sure if that’s it entirely.”

His eyes widened. “You think that she’s involved in this?”

“I’m not sure, but I didn’t see her at the game. When I asked her about it, she seemed to get scared for a moment before she insisted that she was there. She was practically yelling at me. I told her that I supposed I was mistaken, but I actually did look for her. She didn’t sit with us or with her fellow Gryffindors, which is where she claimed she was. I think we should watch her more closely when we can. She is hiding something.”

He took a deep breath. “I guess we can do that. I don’t think it could hurt anything, but make sure not to look like we’re spying.”

She smiled. “Thanks.”

“What was the other thing?”

“Oh, that.” She pulled a page that looked like she’d torn it out of a book, something he’d never seen her do before. “I think that Slytherin’s monster is a basilisk.”

[illegible]

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

A/N The messages on the valentines were copied from Hallmark cards.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 20 – The Chamber of Secrets

“A basilisk?” repeated the concerned voice of the headmistress. Harry and Hermione had immediately come to her with the information the brightest witch of her age had gathered. Aunt Minnie looked over the ripped-out page that described the monster. “That’s why you’ve been hearing the voice. You’re a Parselmouth and it’s a snake.” Harry and Hermione both nodded. “That certainly explains the roosters as well.”

“Roosters?” asked Harry.

“Their crow will kill a basilisk,” said Hermione haughtily. “Didn’t you read that page?”

“Of course I read it,” said Harry while rolling his eyes. “I meant what Aunt Minnie said about it explaining something.”

“Oh,” replied Hermione.

“A few months ago, Madam Grubbly-Plank told me that all the roosters on the grounds had been killed. We ordered more, but they were killed as well. Therefore, I decided to wait until whatever beast was slaughtering them was caught before subjecting more of them to that fate.” She sighed. “I shall have to discretely order another. Hopefully, it’ll get here in time to help us.”

“Hopefully?” questioned Hermione.

“It takes awhile to acquire livestock, especially from the muggle world. All kinds of Ministry parchmentwork. You’d think I was *ordering* a basilisk. It took a month for the roosters to arrive last time.”

“A month?” questioned Harry.

His aunt nodded before turning her attention toward Hermione. Her features conformed to what Harry had learned to be her ‘teaching face.’ “Miss Granger, I must say that I’m disappointed that you would rip a page out of a library book.”

Harry suppressed a grin as he watched his best friend shrink under the headmistress' glare. She put her head down and mumbled, "I, er, was excited that I'd found the answer."

"I'm quite pleased that you found the answer as well, and understand that students aren't allowed to check out that book, but you could have copied the information down or asked me to accompany you to the library to examine the text. I would've given Ravenclaw thirty points, but because of that, I'm only awarding twenty points."

“Yes, ma’am,” said Hermione, still examining the carpet of the headmistress’ office.

“Together, we shall go to the library and tell Madam Pince of your transgression. You will then repair the book and accept whatever punishment our librarian deems appropriate.”

“Yes, ma’am,” seemed to be the only thing Harry’s best friend was capable of saying.

“Oh, and Miss Granger,” said Minnie before pausing for a moment. “If your suspicion turns out to be correct, you will receive a special award for services to the school.”

Hermione finally looked up with a hint of a smile on her face.

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“I thought better of you, Miss Granger!” hissed Madam Pince at the second-year Ravenclaw girl. Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall had all gone to the library and explained what had happened to the librarian. “I thought you respected books! But ripping them to shreds like some illiterate barbarian! What’s next? Will you be burning them?”

“No, ma’am,” said Hermione contritely. Harry could tell that his friend was on the verge of tears. “I’m very sorry. It won’t happen again. Please...”

“Tomorrow, you shall spend your library time dusting books the muggle way.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And then we’ll pretend that this whole ugly incident never happened.”

Hermione looked up to see a slight smile on Madam Pince's face. If Harry didn't know any better, he'd have guessed that the librarian actually liked Hermione. "Thank you, Madam Pince."

“But if you ever do something like that again...”

“I won’t; I promise.”

“But if you do, you’ll be banned from the library. Now, let’s get that book.”

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Hermione easily performed a “*Reparo*,” on the tome, and when they were back in Ravenclaw Tower, Harry commented that her detention was unfair because of how easily the book was fixed, but Hermione argued, “I deserved it. I wasn’t thinking properly,” so he let the issue drop.

The next month went by slowly. Aunt Minnie had ordered a rooster, but commented that it wouldn't help unless she found the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Every teacher that escorted students began looking around every corner with a small mirror, but didn't explain why to the students. The trio was getting closer to the end of the Animagus book, and Harry was tempted to begin the process outlined in the tome, but Hermione reminded him that, "Your Aunt's under enough pressure as it is. She doesn't need her underage nephew caught trying something like that, especially if they find out she gave you the book."

Malfoy seemed to have realized that while Harry was punished for beating him up, he wasn't punished for provoking the headmistress' nephew. Therefore, he made it a point to start insulting Harry and his

"Thanks for walking us back, *Headmistress*," said Harry with a grin. It was Saturday, April 3rd, and some members of C.A.R.E., including him, Hermione, Padma, Neville, Luna and a few others were on their way back to the castle after spending a few hours at headquarters. The trio had noticed that Ginny hadn't shown up. It was just one week before the Ravenclaw versus Slytherin match had been scheduled, but as the Chamber of Secrets hadn't been discovered, it looked like they were not going to play that match.

"It's no trouble, whatsoever, *Mr. McGonagall*," she replied with a hint of a smile as she walked through the door after checking the Entrance Hall with her mirror. "I'm glad we get to spend some time together."

"Me, too, Aunt Minnie," he whispered.

"I noticed that Miss Weasley didn't join you this week," she remarked, casually. Harry had confided his suspicions to her, but she agreed that without proof, they'd be nothing but vague accusations.

"Yeah, so did I," replied Harry. "She didn't say anything. I wonder..."

"Let me rip you. Let me tear your flesh. Let me kill this time!"

Harry paled. "It's happening again, Aunt Minnie!" he whispered so that only she could hear.

"Oh, no!" she replied, now going pale herself. "We have to get the students to safety first before I can investigate." She quickened her pace and the students followed, wondering what was going on.

Harry turned to look Hermione in the eyes and nodded, answering her nonverbal question. As he turned back, he saw Hermione whisper something to Padma. They were nearly to their destination before what appeared to be a herd of Ravenclaw students ran toward them, looking terrified.

"Miss Clearwater!" said Minerva, looking at the prefect at the front of the group, "What has happened?"

The 6th-year girl looked terrified. “We were on our way back from the library when Professor Trelawney and Sean Bradley looked around the corner through a mirror and collapsed, petrified. We all turned back in a hurry and came here another way.”

“Very well,” said Minerva. Let’s get you all into the tower.” She took a deep breath. “I’ll have to speak with the rest of the staff, but it is likely that the school will be closing. It wouldn’t hurt to be ready to leave tomorrow.”

“Headmistress,” said Harry, “Do you think we should talk to that person we discussed?”

"I will," she said, "but you need to go into your dorm."

"But I have to be there," argued Harry.

“You mean, we,” said Hermione with Padma standing next to her. “We’re the ones who noticed things.”

Aunt Minnie looked at the determined expressions on each of their faces and sighed, "I believe that Cindy and Mark will murder me for this, and if they don't Mr. and Mrs. Granger shall see to it, but let's go. I hope I don't regret this."

“I just need to get something out of the tower,” said Harry. “I’ll be right back.”

Minerva put her wand to her throat and made an announcement for all students to return to their dorms, and Harry was back before she was done. The four of them made their way to her office to pick up the rooster she'd ordered and then to Gryffindor Tower, with Aunt Minnie looking around each corner with her mirror. The petrified victims could wait a few minutes, since getting moved to the hospital wing didn't help them anyway.

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The door opened, and for the first time, Harry looked around Gryffindor Tower, taking in the scarlet carpet and chairs, and was

once again thankful that he was a Ravenclaw. He much preferred the color blue. Sitting in one of those red chairs near the fireplace, was the girl they wished to speak to. She looked distraught, and was staring at her diary, as though contemplating throwing it in the fire.

“Ginny,” said Harry, startling her.

She looked up. “Harry, Hermione, Padma, what are you doing here?” She then noticed the person behind them and began trembling slightly. “P-Professor McGonagall, er, what are you doing here?”

“Miss Weasley, it has come to my attention that you have been behaving in an...unusual manner. May I ask...”

“I’m sorry, Headmistress!” she shouted as tears filled her eyes. “I think it was me, but I think this diary’s been making me! Tom...”

“Who’s Tom?” asked Harry.

She held up the diary and showed the first page that had the name “T. M. Riddle” on it.

Harry gasped. “T. Tom. Tom Riddle? That’s Voldemort’s real name!”

Suddenly, Ginny’s eyes glazed over and she quickly drew and pointed her wand. “*Avada Kedavra!*” she hissed in an unearthly voice. A green beam of light shot straight from the tip and hit the target – the rooster in the cage Minerva was holding. It fell down dead as Ginny got up.

She pointed her wand again when a voice came from behind her. “What are you doing, Ginny? That’s the Death Curse!” It was her brother, Ron.

She turned toward him with a look of contempt on her face. “Now you suddenly care about your sister?” She moved her wand in an unusual way and suddenly an incredible force pushed everybody away from her. Harry managed to dive at the last second and avoided the majority of the blast, but it still knocked the wind out of him. She marched determinedly out the door. Harry glanced at the others and saw they were unconscious. He knew that he’d lose Ginny if he

waited to revive them. He bolted out the door just in time to see her turn a corner. He pulled his invisibility cloak out of his pocket and followed as he silenced his shoes.

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Harry couldn't believe what he'd just seen. He'd followed the obviously possessed Ginny into a girl's bathroom, wondering if she just really was taking a necessary detour. He'd actually considered waiting outside for her, but thought he'd regret it. Instead of walking to a stall, she walked up to the sink and said, "*Open*," in Parseltongue.

The sinks moved to reveal a passage and she'd jumped down in it. Harry was going to follow when the sinks moved back to their original position. He walked up to them and found a snake carved on one of the faucets and hissed, "*Open.*"

Deciding that being invisible was pointless during the jump down, because he was sure to make noise anyway, Harry stuffed his cloak back in his pocket and took a leap of faith. He found himself riding down a slimy slide, and was glad he wasn't getting his invisibility cloak all filthy. When he landed, he was ready to summon his wands out of their holsters, but found it was unnecessary as the room he'd landed in was free of all life. All that was in it was a huge collection of dry rat bones. He found himself wishing he'd brought his broom so he could fly over them. Not only would that be faster and less disgusting, but it was also quieter. There was no way he could silence all the crunching bones as he walked forward in the only direction he could go. He knew that with all that noise, there was no point in trying to hide. He slowly made his way forward, passing over a very old snakeskin, until finally commanding a door to, "*Open,*" in Parseltongue, revealing the Chamber of Secrets.

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As Harry stepped into the chamber, he noticed several things at once. The walls were lined with statues of snakes, and in front of him was a huge statue of the ugliest face Harry had ever seen, which he assumed was Salazar Slytherin. Lying on the ground before him, as

though a sacrifice on an alter, was Ginny Weasley. She still had the Diary held loosely in her hands, though she appeared unconscious. Bending over her was the ghostly form of an older teenage boy grabbing her wand.

Having a hunch about the identity of the ghost-like form, but not knowing what he was planning on doing to Ginny, Harry felt he had to act now. Summoning his main wand into his hand, he took a step forward.

"Tom Riddle, I presume?" The specter turned and looked at him in shock, immediately pointing his wand at the intruder. "Or should I say, Voldemort?"

"How did you get in here?" Riddle hissed.

"I followed Ginny," Harry said simply.

"But the door was closed."

Harry grinned. "You're not the only Parselmouth around here."

Tom looked at Harry with a new interest, almost bordering on respect. "Is the McGonagall family related to Slytherin?"

"I have no idea," he said, knowing that it wouldn't make any difference in this case anyway.

"No matter, no matter," said Riddle. "You're obviously talented. There's no reason for us to fight. You could join..."

"*Expelliarmus!*" whispered Harry, hoping to catch Tom off guard.

Unfortunately, Riddle was a very skilled duelist and repelled the hex with one stroke of his wand and had disarmed Harry a moment later with another silent spell.

"Fool!" hissed Riddle as he caught Harry's wand with his left hand. "Did you really think you could beat me? *Crucio!*" As Harry writhed on the floor in tremendous pain, Voldemort continued to talk. "Had you not tried to attack me, your death would've been swift, but now I want

to make you suffer a bit.” While Harry was still in agony, Riddle hissed to the statue and the mouth opened. Harry closed his eyes when he realized that the basilisk would be coming.

The pain stopped as Riddle said, “I’ll let the basilisk finish you off slowly,” and then hissed, “*Keep your eyes closed. I want you to slowly rip him into pieces while he suffers.*”

“Yessss, masssster,” replied the snake, and Harry decided to risk squinting at the basilisk, to see that the sixty-foot snake was obeying as it approached him as he was still lying on the ground.

Harry realized that he had only one chance, and he was going to take it. Keeping his left hand hidden from Tom’s view, he summoned his extra wand and prepared to cast his most powerful spell. He’d learned that the snake’s skin was protected from almost every hex, so he needed to shoot in its mouth. The beast was now close enough and poised above him, ready to strike with its mouth open.

Harry aimed his wand and shot his most powerful cutting spell, which managed to cut through the top of the snake’s head, splashing blood everywhere. Harry closed his eyes and rolled out of the way as the beast shrieked until falling with a loud THUD.

“You may have killed the basilisk,” said Tom, causing Harry to open his eyes, “but I will kill you! *Avada...*” Harry jumped behind the corpse for protection. “You can’t hide forever!” shouted Tom angrily.

With sudden inspiration, Harry crawled toward the basilisk’s open mouth and whispered, “*Accio Diary!*” while pointing his wand toward Ginny.

It took about two seconds for Riddle to see what was happening. “What!” he shouted as Harry caught the diary. Once more, he shouted, “*Avada...*” as Harry jammed the diary into the snake’s largest fang while still on his knees. Tom dropped the wands he was holding as he screamed in pain while a river of black ink started pouring from the diary all over the snake’s mouth and down Harry’s arms. A hole was forming in Riddle’s chest. Harry pulled the book down and opened it, forcing it once again into the monster’s now

black teeth, releasing yet more ink. With a final scream, the specter disappeared.

Harry released the breath he didn't realize he was holding as he sat down, finally relaxing. After about five seconds, a girl's voice brought him back into the present. "Harry, you were right. It was me. I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to. Riddle made me do it."

He turned to face the trembling girl to see that tears were streaming from her eyes. Although they didn't look alike, in a way she reminded him of his kid sister. "I know," he said as he got up to walk toward her.

"I'm going to be expelled!" Ginny wept as Harry helped her awkwardly to her feet. "I've looked forward to coming to Hogwarts ever since B-Bill came and n-now I'll have to leave and – w-what'll Mum and Dad say?"

As Harry looked down at this weeping girl and saw how scared she was, he couldn't help but want to comfort her. He wiped his right hand on his school robe, figuring it was already ruined, and put it on her shoulder. "What they'll say, Ginny, is that they love you."

"What if they don't believe me?" she asked, clearly terrified.

"Then I'll make sure they know it wasn't your fault," he said confidently.

"Thanks," she managed to say.

"That's what friends are for. Come on. I'll bet a lot of people are worried about us."

After collecting the fallen wands and the diary, they walked side by side out of the chamber and down the corridor until they reached the entrance. Harry looked at Ginny. "You, er, don't remember how to get out of here, do you?"

She shook her head and started sobbing softly. "No. I don't even remember coming down here. I'd just black out and wake up somewhere else. The last thing I remember today is you saying that Tom was really You-Know-Who."

"That's fine," he said quickly, not wanting to get her crying in earnest, and began looking around. "There's got to be a way out." His eyes finally rested on a carving of a snake. Concentrating on that, Harry hissed, "*Exit*." He then heard a soft, familiar sound that he couldn't identify until he looked in the place he'd come out of. The bottom of the slide he'd come out of seemed to be moving up like a conveyer belt. He didn't know how long that would last, so he said, "Come on, Ginny," before getting on and riding up the mucky slide.

When he reached the top and was back in the bathroom, he found the ghost of a girl with glasses watching him. "What are you doing in my bathroom? You're a boy and this is the girls' lavatory!"

"I'm, um, sorry to have disturbed you. I'll be, um, leaving in a minute." He was relieved to see Ginny arrive.

"You're here, too!" shrieked the ghost. "I know! Let's all have a party in Moaning Myrtle's toilet! She won't care!" She then dove into a toilet, causing it to flush as she disappeared.

"That was a...unique ghost," said Harry.

"I g-guess so," Ginny agreed.

Taking a deep breath, Harry said, "We'd best get going. I'd imagine my aunt, along with most of the teachers, is in the hospital wing."

"Wh-what happened?" Ginny asked fearfully.

As gently as he could, Harry explained what had occurred from the time she was possessed as they made their way to the hospital wing. She was devastated to hear she'd used the killing curse, even if it was on a rooster. As they approached their destination, the headmistress' voice carried.

"I don't care what you say, Poppy, I'm going to join the search for my nephew!"

"But you've got a concussion! You won't be any help if you..."

“I think I can resolve this argument,” said Harry from the doorway, grinning broadly. “I’ll find myself.”

“Harry!” shouted Minerva, as well as Hermione and Padma, who were also in hospital beds, along with a few Gryffindors who’d been nearby. The heads of house were in there as well, surrounding the headmistress’ bed.

Hermione’s face turned frightened as she noticed Harry’s companion. “Harry, is G-Ginny...”

“Ginny’s not possessed anymore,” said Harry firmly, “but could probably use Madam Pomfrey’s help.”

At that moment, a distraught-looking middle-aged couple with red hair came bursting into the room. The woman looked around until her eyes rested on the girl who was obviously her daughter. “Ginny?! Professor Sinistra said you were...missing. That you...” At that moment the little girl ran into her mum’s arms crying.

“I’m sorry! Tom made me! I...”

As Molly Weasley hugged her daughter tightly, she asked, “What happened?” Ginny started crying again.

“I was just about to examine Miss Weasley for injuries,” interrupted Madam Pomfrey, “and I believe that Mr. McGonagall was about to explain what happened. You may wish to listen to what he has to say.” She was gesturing toward Harry in her effort to get them to leave Ginny alone.

“McGonagall?” Arthur asked, looking between Harry and Minerva.

“Yes,” the headmistress answered. “Harry is my nephew’s son and has just brought Ginny back.” Looking at him, she said, “These are Arthur and Molly Weasley – Ginny’s parents.”

“It’s good to meet you,” said Arthur, looking at the filthy 12-year-old with curiosity and gratitude. He shook his hand. “It appears that we owe you our gratitude.” Molly also shook Harry’s hand and thanked him for bringing Ginny back.

As Poppy examined the youngest Weasley, Harry told his story of what happened beginning with Ginny's unusual behavior leading them to confront Ginny in the Gryffindor common room until they left the Chamber of Secrets, leaving out the part about wearing an invisibility cloak to follow her. At different times, Molly looked like she wanted to interrupt, but Arthur stopped her with a pat on her hand.

When Harry was finished, Minerva said, "Well, I believe that I promised Miss Granger a reward for special services to the school since her theory about Slytherin's monster being a basilisk turned out to be true." Hermione blushed. "I also believe that Harry is entitled to one for ridding us of that beast."

"Thanks," he managed.

"I also think that fifty points to Ravenclaw is in order." Flitwick nodded approvingly at Minerva's statement.

"Regarding Miss Weasley, no punishment will be given. Older and more experienced wizards than her have been hoodwinked by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named." She sighed. "However, there are many witnesses to the incident in her common room, and we can't obliviate them all. Therefore, I believe that the only way to stop the rumors that are probably already spreading is to tell everyone the truth at dinner tonight."

Arthur nodded sadly. "I suppose so. We'll tell Ginny."

"Very well," said Minerva. "I will also announce that the restrictions will now be lifted since Slytherin's monster has been defeated. I believe that Professor LaVelle may wish to harvest the basilisk for potion ingredients."

Harry looked a bit shocked before saying, "She'll claim I simply got tired of sending the basilisk to petrify muggle-borns, and that's why I killed it."

"It's either her or I call Mr. Snape," she threatened, causing Harry to pale. "I just don't want the parts wasted." With a genuine smile, she added, "I'll bet you can make a great deal of money from selling it."

She blushed. “Well, no, but it’s more...”

“It wouldn’t matter if it was a million people in class. You’d still get the right answer. Now, the right answer is catching, passing and scoring with the Quaffle.”

"I suppose," she said, noncommittally.

“Whatever happens, I’ll be proud of you.”

[illegible]

“Welcome to the Ravenclaw versus Slytherin match!” announced Lee Jordan, “Our first game since Quidditch has resumed!” The crowd cheered loudly. “And here come the Ravenclaws! At the front of the line is the lovely Michelle Hamilton – sorry Headmistress – captain and Chaser, followed by Roger Davies – Chaser – and Hermione Granger – reserve Chaser replacing Sean Bradley in her debut game. The list went on until he finally said, “and Harry McGonagall – Seeker!” to tremendous applause.

“And now, the Slytherin team!” There were more boo’s than cheers as all the players from Captain/Chaser Marcus Flint to Seeker Terrence Higgs were announced. Harry grinned when he saw Michelle holding her own in the ridiculous pre-game handshake. He even chuckled afterwards when Flint flexed his fingers as though they were slightly hurt. Madam Hooch gave her usual ‘clean game’ speech, and the balls were released.

Harry flew his Lightning Bolt high in the air and began his quest for the Snitch, glancing at the action whenever he could.

“And Michelle Hamilton has just stolen the Quaffle right out of Flint’s slimy hands! Sorry, Headmistress,” said Lee as he sat next to Aunt Minnie, who refused to give up her position of keeping the commentary as unbiased as possible. “What! That filthy Slytherin cheat! Flint’s just punched Hamilton in the face, making her drop the Quaffle. Her boyfriend’s gonna be paying Flint a visit after the game. Madam Hooch...has actually called a penalty on Slytherin. Sorry, Professor. I’m just not used to it yet.”

Harry laughed at Jordan's comment as he looked at Michelle in concern, noticing that she was already forming a black eye. He gripped his broom tightly as he felt himself get angry. Even if he was mostly over his crush, he was fond of his captain, even if she didn't understand why he had to beat Draco up. He watched her make the penalty shot she was given, easily winning more points. He then resumed his search for the evasive Snitch, which had yet to show itself.

A half-hour into the game, Jordan announced, "And Granger now has the Quaffle! She avoids one Bludger. The other barely grazes her shoulder as she continues toward the Slytherin hoops."

Harry glanced at his friend and saw her determined face as she faked out the Keeper until Lee shouted, "She scores! The game is sixty to thirty with Ravenclaw in the lead." With Madam Hooch actually giving Slytherin penalties, their complete lack of Quidditch skills was showing up more and more. It was at that moment Harry noticed Padma holding a banner that depicted an eagle with a snake in its beak. He grinned and moved his gaze to finally see the Snitch on the other side of the pitch – about ten feet behind Higgs. He did the only thing he could and dove toward the ground in the middle of the pitch.

"It looks like McGonagall has seen the Snitch! Higgs is trying to catch up. McGonagall avoids a Bludger, slowing down a bit. Higgs is near him." Harry noticed the other Bludger was headed toward him, and that he was directly between Higgs and that Bludger, and took his chance. At the last second he pulled up out of the way and toward the actual location of the winged ball. He heard the THUD of the Bludger ramming Higgs. "The Slytherins hit their own Seeker with a Bludger! He barely stayed on his broom! It looks like McGonagall's heading another direction. Was that a feint? Higgs is finally following Harry as he reaches out his hand. McGonagall got the Snitch! Ravenclaw wins two-hundred ten to thirty! The Slytherins are out of the running for the House cup!"

All the Ravenclaw players flew together to congratulate themselves. Harry found an ecstatic Hermione and shouted, "I knew you'd do great!"

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Even though in truth, Hermione had only scored one of the six goals the team had made, she still felt great about it. She knew that Bradley would've done better if he hadn't been petrified, but she really felt that she was part of the team – more than she had before. When they'd exited the changing rooms, she hugged Harry in her excitement.

"I actually scored!"

With a huge smile, he said, "I never had a doubt in my mind!"

[illegible]

The next morning, the school, and specifically the Ravenclaw team, was still talking about the game when Harry, Hermione, Headmistress McGonagall and Professor LaVelle left breakfast to head toward the Chamber of Secrets. The Potions teacher had agreed to help in exchange for being able to keep some of the rare items they were removing from the basilisk. Harry was uncomfortable revealing his Parseltongue ability to the teacher who had accused him of being the Heir of Slytherin and had talked it over with his aunt, who came up with a solution. After they went into Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, Minerva took out her wand.

"I'm sorry, Sharon, Hermione, but I really don't want anyone else to learn the password, so I'd appreciate it if you'll allow me to cast a spell on you to prevent you from hearing it. Harry already knows it since he followed Ginny, but has promised not to reveal it to anyone. Also, once the spell is cast, would you please turn around so you can't read lips?"

Hermione had been warned about this and cooperated immediately, while Professor LaVelle seemed irritated, but allowed the spell to be cast on her. Harry hissed the word, “*Open*,” in snake language, and watched as the sinks moved apart. Minerva cancelled the spell on the others and they watched, fascinated by what they were seeing.

Before anyone could comment, Harry jumped down the hole and disappeared from view. They'd all been warned about the slimy entrance and had appropriately dressed in old rags they didn't mind getting dirty.

Grinning, Harry commented, "If we slide down that a few more times, it'll probably be clean," after the rest landed.

"I do not believe zat I would like to make a habit of zis," said LaVelle.

"Nor I," agreed Aunt Minnie.

Harry took the lead and began walking. "Since there was no choice," he said, "I decided that this must have been the way she went."

"Makes sense," commented Hermione.

"Oh, by the way," said the Headmistress, "I told Albus Dumbledore about what we were doing, and he requested certain items."

"Oh?" asked Harry, not sure what to think.

"I told him that it was up to you, Harry, since you located and killed the basilisk, but that I'd recommend that you sell him what he wants at a discount."

Harry grinned at the idea of making a profit from selling this to the former headmaster, but he did realize that Dumbledore could make a lot of trouble for him if he wanted. "What does he want?"

"I've got a small list here, but the main thing he requested is five liters of basilisk venom."

"Fine," agreed Harry just as they walked over the old snake skin. "Do you think this is worth anything?"

"Possibly," said Sharon. "Ve might as well take it along." She then took off her backpack and they stuffed it inside. Harry happily noted that it was bottomless, so it would be able to carry everything.

When they reached the door, Aunt Minnie used the same silencing spell to prevent LaVelle from finding out Harry spoke Parseltongue and they entered the chamber. It already stank in there from the rotting corpse.

The Potions teacher muttered what Harry believed to be a French expletive and turned to him. "You faced zis beast by yourself and zlew it? You are very brave and did not deserve ze treatment I 'ave given you. I apologize for accusing you."

Harry wasn't entirely sure if he wanted to forgive her or not, but at the same time, she was one of his teachers and did teach Potions very well. He sighed. "I guess I can forgive you, but why wouldn't you believe me?"

"I zaw you pointing your wand at ze cat," she began, before lowering her head. "Zat iz not true. Zat iz not why I inzited. I..."

"What is it, Sharon?" asked McGonagall, now looking somewhere between concerned and angry.

"Mizter Malfoy threatened my family if I did not cooperate. He zaid zat there would be *occurnazes* at 'ogwartz, and zat I waz to bring suspicion on 'arry McGonagall."

"He what!?" shouted Harry. "I knew he was behind it!"

"He zaid it would disgrace ze Headmiztress." She began sobbing as she looked at Harry. "You made it easy when I caught you the first time."

"I suppose so," agreed Harry, "but how did you know..."

"When zere waz an attack? After each attack, a note would appear in my quarterz, zo I would hurry zer. You always zeemed to arrive before me. How?"

Harry exchanged a look between his aunt and his best friend. "I'm sorry. I...somehow...sensed...when an attack occurred." It wasn't a lie. Hearing was one of the five senses.

LaVelle looked at him in awe. “Are you a seer?”

Harry did his best to stop the smile from appearing on his face, but Hermione didn't try to hide hers. "I don't think so," said Harry. "I'm not planning on taking Divination, either."

“Perhaps you should,” the teacher insisted. “You may have ze gift.” LaVelle really looked excited. “True seers are very rare.”

Harry tried to think of a way to convince the woman he wasn't a seer without revealing that he was a Parselmouth, but couldn't think of any. Instead, he changed the subject. "I believe that we're here because that snake needs to be dissected."

Sharon shrugged her shoulders. "I guess we'll get to it, but thiz isn't over." As she reached into her bag for tools, Harry walked back outside the room and took one of his textbooks out to read. He'd have brought the Animagus book he was nearly done with, but he was afraid LaVelle would see it. He lit up his wand and started reading, doing his best not to think of the bloody business going on in the next room.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 21 – The Quidditch Cup

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DID THAT!" shouted Cindy McGonagall through her mirror at Harry. Both he and Aunt Minnie had put off telling his parents about the Chamber of Secrets business, but the truth had finally come out in a conversation between his mom and his aunt a few minutes before. Harry hadn't even gotten any warning before his mom called him. She had just finished allowing him to explain his side of the story. He was currently alone in C.A.R.E. headquarters. "You could've been killed! You promised not to use that cloak to get in dangerous situation!"

"No, I didn't," answered Harry. "I promised not to use it to go somewhere students weren't allowed. I did not wear it in the Chamber of Secrets."

"That's just a technicality," she countered. Harry noticed that her face was getting pink.

Standing his ground, Harry responded calmly, "If I hadn't done it, then Ginny Weasley, an eleven-year-old girl, would be dead right now, and a younger version of Voldemort would be back. He'd have probably attacked the school from the inside and killed every muggle-born here. He'd probably have included me in that number. I'm not going to apologize for saving lives."

His mom took a deep breath, obviously trying to calm herself. "I understand that you didn't have time to call anyone else, and I suppose it was the right thing to do, but you could have easily been killed. Promise me you won't do that again."

With a cheeky grin, Harry said, "I promise I won't follow a possessed Ginny Weasley into the Chamber of Secrets ever again."

Making a face at her son, Cindy rebutted, "Promise me you won't purposely go into dangerous situations again."

Harry sighed. He knew he couldn't lie to his mother properly. "I can't promise that." His mom opened her mouth to reply, but he cut her off. "I do promise that if I can, I'll get proper help. However, in that

situation, I didn't have time. It was our one chance and I took it, and I don't regret it."

She sighed. "I wonder if that's just part of being Harry Potter. Aunt Minnie said there was a prophecy about you and Voldemort."

"I doubt that. Unless it says something like, '*The Dark Lord won't leave Harry Potter alone until one of them kills the other,*' then I think it's just coincidence."

His mom giggled for a moment. "I suppose not."

"Then we're alright," said Harry. "I'm not in trouble?"

"I guess not, but please, please be careful for the rest of the year."

"Okay," agreed Harry. "Bye."

"I love you," she said.

"Loveyou too," he muttered before deactivating the mirror.

He had just put it back in his pocket when the door opened. The last person he ever expected was standing there with large glasses that made her eyes look huge and shawls. Harry faintly detected the aroma of cooking sherry in the air. He knew who she was, but before he could say anything, she focused on him with an obviously fake vacant expression on her face. "My dear boy, the inner-eye has told me that that you are about to make a *grave mistake*. It has shown me that you possess the sight, but are considering letting this precious gift go to waste." She sighed in a melodramatic way, putting her hand on her forehead before continuing. "I see that *someone* in your family has turned you away from the noble art, but you must see *beyond* her prejudices and realize that she only doubts because she *envies* your gift granted by fate and wishes your soul to be as dry and shriveled up as hers."

Harry didn't know whether to burst out laughing or to take offense at the jab Trelawney had taken at his aunt. Instead, he decided to go with the truth. "In other words, Professor LaVelle has informed you that she thinks I have that gift and you're trying to persuade me to

sign up for Divination.” Deciding to be friendly, he added, “It’s good to meet you, by the way, Professor Trelawney.” He stood up and offered her his hand.

She nervously shook his hand with both of hers as she said, “Dear boy, I have foreseen that you and your loved ones will be in *grave danger* and won’t be warned of it unless you learn to channel your inner eye and have merely come to offer my services to begin your instruction in the noble art next year.” She looked at him closely, as though examining him. “Your aura is pulsing. You need to learn to use your great gift. With proper instruction, you could almost be as great a seer as I.”

Controlling his expression so that he wasn't smirking at her, he responded in a most serious tone of voice, "But you've also foreseen that I won't be taking the class either, haven't you."

“Your future is clouded,” she rebuffed. “You yet have time to turn away from your grave error. I shall leave you to contemplate your future, dear boy.” With that said, she turned around and walked away. Harry got up and looked out the window, and once the Divination Professor was well out of earshot, he started laughing. He couldn’t wait to tell his friends about this.

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All Harry's friends and family were amused at Trelawney's attempt to get him to sign up for her course, although Hermione seemed a bit disillusioned about the subject, or at least that professor, after hearing the story.

“She actually pretended that she’d *perceived* that you had the gift?” Hermione clarified.

“Exactly. She wouldn’t just admit that LaVelle told her so. She told about how not taking the course would be a *dreadful* mistake.”

"Maybe I won't sign up for Divination," Hermione muttered.

"I know I'm not. Even if I'd planned on it before – which I didn't – I wouldn't now because she'd put a lot more pressure on me since I'm supposed to have the *gift*." He then paused. "Hold on. You were actually planning to sign up for that course?"

"Yes," she replied. "I was going to sign up for all the courses."

He stared at his best friend for about ten seconds. “You do know that there’s a limit to how many classes we can take, don’t you? I’ll be taking Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy and Ancient Runes, and that’s the most elective courses you’re allowed.”

“But I’ll still want to take Muggle Studies,” she argued.

"We've helped *teach* Muggle Studies," he replied in exasperation.

“But...”

“You can buy their book and take the O.W.L. in fifth-year without taking the class, Hermione. That’s what I’m planning to do. It should be quite easy for anyone who’s lived as a muggle.”

She sighed, looking defeated. “I suppose you’re right.”

He grinned. "Of course I am. Besides," he added, "in order to attend all those classes you'd have to find a way to be two places at once."

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It was a few days later that the preparations were completed for the prank on Draco Malfoy. It involved finding out the scheduled lessons in Herbology and brewing a particularly difficult potion, not to mention Harry's wonderful cloak.

Normally, Draco Malfoy would show up in the Great Hall for breakfast at about the same time as Harry, Hermione and Padma. However, this particular Tuesday morning, Padma arrived alone – or so it appeared. With his shoes silenced and under his cloak, Harry walked in the room right behind her. Hermione was preparing her portion of the prank. Harry sneaked over to the Slytherin table, right behind

It was actually very difficult for Harry to concentrate on Transfiguration right after breakfast, even while observing Padma staring admiringly at Assistant Professor Matthew Shapon as he went through the lesson on turning small animals into footrests. Most of the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor class had been loaned a gerbil for the lesson, but Harry noticed that a few, like Ron Weasley, had brought their pets. Harry and Padma were able to change their gerbils on the second try, while Hermione took only one try. Neville got it the third or fourth try, but by the end of class, all that it seemed Weasley had accomplished was stretching out his rat to the shape of a Frisbee, obviously terrifying it. The poor thing had even peed on Ron in the process, causing him to yell in shock, losing a point from Gryffindor.

Finally, class got over and they marched to the greenhouses for Herbology with Slytherin. Harry was looking forward to this class, and his reason had nothing to do with academics. The trio went to a table with Michael Corner for the practical lesson.

"Why are you three looking at the door?" he asked a minute after they sat down.

Harry looked at him with an innocent expression. "No reason. We're just being observant."

Padma added, "You should be observant, too, especially of Malfoy when he starts pruning his Abyssinian shrivelfigs."

With a mischievous grin, Michael said, "I'll do that."

No sooner had he said that when the object of their discussion strutted into the classroom flanked, as usual, by Crabbe and Goyle. Harry had to stop himself from laughing too soon. As predicted, Sprout told them to start pruning the new plant. Being very visible, Harry, Hermione and Padma got up and walked toward the Professor.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"Yes," said Hermione. "We had a question about..."

While the trio was standing next to Professor Sprout, Draco Malfoy was grabbing an armful of withered stalks before suddenly dropping

them and yelling, “Wha....” While everybody in the room watched, his skin turned green and his hair turned into leaves. Small apricots budded from his fingernails and his nose morphed into a banana.

The whole class burst out laughing, although Crabbe and Goyle stopped with one glare from their leader. It was obvious that even Professor Sprout was having a hard time not laughing as she said, "You will all continue working while I escort Mr. Malfoy to the hospital wing. Miss Granger, you're in charge."

Malfoy stayed that way for two days. Although no one ever accused the trio, Aunt Minnie winked at Harry the next time she saw him.

[illegible]

Time continued to press forward, and before he knew it, Harry was sitting in the Quidditch stands with the Ravenclaws in their study group. It was the eighth of May, and Gryffindor would be playing Hufflepuff.

“Welcome to the Quidditch match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff!” announced Lee Jordan happily. “Of course, no matter what happens Gryffindor will be in the final match next month. Sorry, Professor. Here comes the Gryffindor team.” Harry joined in the cheering as Lee continued. “Captain and Keeper – Oliver Wood! Those unbeatable Beaters – Fred and George Weasley!” Harry cheered loudly for his friends. “The Chasers – the lovely Angelina Johnson, who still won’t go out with me. Sorry, Professor. Katie Bell, and replacing Alicia Spinnet in his debut game – Dean Thomas. Finally, Gryffindor’s undefeated Seeker – Ginny Weasley!” Harry and his friends cheered once more. He had been concerned about her since the Chamber incident, but she seemed to have bounced back, and was smiling brightly as she flew to her position.

The Hufflepuff team was announced, including the Seeker – Cedric Diggory. Harry watched the two captains shake hands. The Hufflepuff captain was a seventh-year, and the rumor was that Cedric would most likely be the new captain next year. The balls were released, and the game began.

“Angelina Johnson has got the Quaffle. She flies under Cadwallader and passes to Katie Bell. She approaches the goals. She shoots. It’s good! Gryffindor leads ten-nothing!”

Harry cheered before turning his attention to the two Seekers when Hermione observed, “Ginny looks very small next to Cedric.”

“But she looks a lot more determined,” commented Padma.

“Actually,” said Harry, “her smaller size gives her an advantage over Diggory.”

“That explains why you get the Snitch then,” teased Hermione. Harry stuck his tongue out at her and turned his attention back to the Seekers. They were both hovering around the field in search of the evasive tiny golden Snitch.

Harry’s attention was drawn away from them when he heard Jordan say, “Katie passes the Quaffle to Thomas – who drops the ball! Hufflepuff Chaser Wayne Hopkins caught it and is heading toward the Gryffindor goals. I hope Wood is ready for him. Sorry, Professor.” Harry was one of the few people at Hogwarts who knew that secretly, his aunt enjoyed the way that Lee would show bias toward Gryffindor, and that she wasn’t really mad at him. She just had to maintain her image of being strict.

“Parvati says that Dean was just recruited for the game a few days ago,” commented Padma. “Wood doesn’t have a reserve team that practices, so I can’t blame Thomas for not being very good.”

Harry nodded and watched as Hopkins was about to shoot the Quaffle toward the goal. Oliver was ready for him. Instead, Wayne threw the ball over his shoulder to Cadwallader, performing a perfect reverse pass just before a Bludger sent by Fred or George hit him. Cadwallader then threw the Quaffle through a hoop before Wood realized he had the ball.

“That was another lucky shot!” declared Lee Jordan while the Hufflepuff supporters were celebrating loudly. “The score is now sixty-twenty, in favor of Hufflepuff.” Harry wondered how even Lee could believe that move was accidental. The Puff’s had obviously been

practicing, and at the same time, the Gryffindor Chasers were no longer a well-oiled scoring machine without Alicia Spinnet.

The game went on for another hour, with Dean Thomas' fumbles, combined with the Hufflepuff's hard work causing the point spread to keep widening. The score was 210 to 50 in Hufflepuff's favor when Lee announced, "It looks like Ginny Weasley has seen the Snitch!"

Harry knew it was true. He could see it now, and had seen it about a half-hour before, but he was the only one. Ginny had seen it before Cedric and was therefore ahead of him. She reached out her hand and Jordan announced, "Weasley has caught the Snitch, but Hufflepuff wins."

“He sounded sad when he said that,” commented Luna. “There must be Wincrupts hovering above his head.”

“That must be it,” replied Harry. “Either that, or he’s not happy Gryffindor lost the game.”

Luna looked introspective. “I suppose that’s a possibility.”

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The next day, Harry, Hermione, Ginny and Neville were walking in the halls of Hogwarts toward the library. They'd just left the rest of the study group in C.A.R.E. Headquarters listening to music.

"You did a good job in the game yesterday, Ginny," said Harry.

“Thanks, but we still lost.”

"That wasn't your fault," said Neville. "It was Dean's."

“The point is that you got the Snitch,” said Hermione.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose. Either way, we'll be facing each other for the final game, Harry."

He grinned at her. "And then you'll prove that you're the second-best Seeker in the school."

She frowned, but before she could say anything, a slightly nasal voice came from behind them. "Well, if it isn't the mudblood, son-of-a-squib, squib, and psycho," said Draco, indicating Hermione, Harry, Neville and Ginny respectively. He was flanked by Crabbe and Goyle, as usual.

Harry touched his mirror and whispered, "Minerva McGonagall," before turning around. "I thought I already taught you a lesson in manners, Malfoy. Do you need a refresher?"

Draco snorted as though that were a joke. Dumb and Dumber laughed. "You're the one who gets in trouble. Your stupid aunt wants to make sure no one thinks she's showing favoritism. She should realize that a filthy son-of-a-squib needs all the help they can get."

Harry glared at his nemesis, while whispering the command to release a wand into his left hand – just in case. He kept it out of sight as Draco turned to Hermione. "Well, *filthy* mudblood, do you think you can do anything to me? Father says he should use his influence to have mudbloods, squibs and their children kicked out of Hogwarts."

Hermione said, "That is the only way you'd be a top student," causing Harry, Ginny and Neville to laugh.

Ginny said, "If squibs are kicked out, then you'll be the first three to go."

Draco glared, but before he could answer, Harry asked, "Isn't your father busy with his elf-abuse problem?"

"No, you filthy Squib-spawn! We've got new elves now, but it cost a lot of money, and we're going to take it out of your hide." Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle drew their wands, although the latter two were holding the wrong ends and pointing the handles at Harry's friends.

"You'll do no such thing!" shouted Headmistress McGonagall from behind the Slytherins. "One hundred points from Slytherin! I will NOT tolerate prejudiced behavior at this school!" Harry grinned when he

saw her standing next to Lucus Cleanaway, the man who'd been doing Filch's job ever since he'd been petrified. His long, blonde hair was in a ponytail and his moustache was as bushy as ever. He looked very angry and was glaring at Draco. Harry knew the man was strict and was very prejudiced against bigots.

"Your nephew's been threatening us," countered Malfoy.

“We’ve been observing your entire conversation, Mr. Malfoy. I’ll take another ten points for lying.” She turned to Crabbe and Goyle. “All three of you will serve a week of detentions with Mr. Cleanaway, cleaning toilets the muggle way!”

“But...” argued Draco, looking angry. “When my father hears...”

“Perhaps I should give the whole board of governors, not just your father, a copy of our memories of this event,” she interrupted. “Then they can decide what to do with you. I will NOT tolerate you starting trouble anymore, and would be more than happy to expel you if I catch you behaving like this again. Is that clear?”

Draco's ears were pink. "Yes, ma'am," he hissed. "May I go?"

“Yes, Mr. Malfoy. Mr. Cleanaway will pick you up from the Slytherin dormitory later tonight.

Once the Slytherins were gone, Minnie said, “Alerting me through your mirror was an excellent idea. Five points to Ravenclaw.”

[illegible]

When the 30th of May arrived, the mandrakes were finally mature, so Professor LaVelle made the potion needed to revive all of the basilisk victims. While most were happily reuniting with their friends, Mr. Filch was packing, while telling Mrs. Norris how unfair the Headmistress was in firing him so that some wizard can wave his wand around the castle – never getting it truly clean. He was even overheard mentioning how he'd like to hang the whole McGonagall family by its thumbs before walking out the door. Although they wondered what Filch would do now, most of the students – including Harry – couldn't

help but cheer when they realized they'd never have to put up with Filch and Mrs. Norris again. Brianna told him that she was happy she'd never have to meet the man if he was half as foul as her brother had described. "It sounds like you and Aunt Minnie have really cleaned up the school for me," she commented. "Now I'm looking forward to going this year."

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The next week passed quickly, with all the Quidditch practice that Michelle put the team through. From what Harry heard, the Gryffindor team was on the pitch whenever the Ravenclaw team wasn't. Both were preparing for the match that Saturday. The next week would be final exams.

Another thing of note that happened that week was that they signed up for their third-year electives. The whole trio signed up for Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. They also finished the Animagi book, and after looking at their final chapter summaries, Professor McGonagall agreed to give them lessons starting in September, warning them not to try anything until then.

[illegible]

“Welcome, everyone, to the Quidditch Final – Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw!” announced Lee, causing the crowd to cheer. “This match will determine who wins the Quidditch Cup. Here’s...Gryffindor! Captain and Keeper – Oliver Wood! Chasers – The lovely Angelina Johnson, Alicia Spinnet and Katie Bell – together again! Sorry, Professor. Those Unbeatable Beaters – Fred and George Weasley, and their sister – Seeker Ginny Weasley!”

The crowd cheered loudly, and when the applause had settled, Jordan announced the Ravenclaw team and mentioned that both Seekers were undefeated, but that would change this match. This time there were no reserves playing, so Hermione was on the bench in her uniform, sitting next to Cho and cheering the team on.

It was a brutal match – not from cheating like Slytherins, but from how everyone was playing. Every person out there wanted the Quidditch Cup – that much was obvious. Harry knew this was Michelle's last year at Hogwarts, so she wanted it more than most. She, along with Roger Davies and Sean Bradley, were working together as a well-oiled scoring machine against Gryffindor's equally well-oiled scoring machine of Katie, Alicia and Angelina. Both sets of Beaters were giving their all, but Harry hated to admit that the Weasley twins were just a bit better than the ones on his team. He figured it had something to do with them being twins. He hovered above the pitch in search of the Snitch, knowing that the game may very well come down to the Seekers. He found himself near his rival – Ginny.

"It's about time we got to play against each other," she commented.

"Yeah," he agreed while still looking around the pitch. "It'll be fun grabbing the Snitch right when you think you have it."

"In your dreams," she said. "We may be friends, but I am not letting you win."

"Who said anything about letting me win?" he asked, looking offended. "I'm going to beat you fair and square, and then everyone will know that you're the second-best Seeker at Hogwarts."

"Keep telling yourself that," she said, sounding like she was talking down to him. Instead of responding, Harry's face took on a look of concentration and he dove toward the ground. Ginny followed him, amazed that she could keep up with his newer broom.

"It looks like McGonagall has seen the Snitch!"

Harry had a grin on his face as he performed the Wronski Feint, making sure not to go so fast that he'd pull up before Ginny reached the ground. However, about half-way down, she stopped and started speeding toward Gryffindor's hoops.

"Was McGonagall trying to fool Weasley? If he was, it's backfired. I think she's found the Snitch!"

Harry heard that and immediately pulled up and pushed his broom to the limit, heading in the direction she was going until he passed her. He was almost to the hoops when he realized that he couldn't see the golden ball anywhere. He turned around to see Ginny hovering above the pitch, laughing at him.

While he flew back into his searching position, Lee said, "It looks like Weasley was pulling a feint of her own. Good one, Ginny! Sorry, Professor." Harry muttered a few words his aunt wouldn't approve of as he tried ignoring the smirk Ginny was giving him.

At this point, the score was 60 to 80, in favor of Gryffindor. Fred and George had stopped a few of Ravenclaw's Chasers with well-timed Bludgers. Both Keepers were good, but so were all the Chasers. Harry watched as Alicia stole the Quaffle from Roger, only to have it stolen back by Michelle.

Finally, Harry spotted the Snitch on the other side of the pitch. He glanced at Ginny, who was closer, and saw that she'd noticed it as well. He decided that it was time to see just how good his broom was as he accelerated toward the winged-ball, starting at the same moment as Ginny.

"I don't think this is a feint," announced Lee. "Whoever catches the Snitch will win the Quidditch Cup for their team. McGonagall is gaining on Weasley. Will she reach it in time?"

Harry heard Oliver yell for Ginny to elbow him when her fingertips were a few feet from the Snitch. She did, causing what would probably become a bruise in his right arm, but slowed down in the process. Harry managed to get past her and grabbed the Snitch, pulling it out of the air just before the Weasley girl reached it. The crowd went wild as he threw his hand in the air.

Lee didn't seem very enthusiastic when he announced, "Harry McGonagall has caught the Snitch. Ravenclaw wins the cup."

While he was flying toward his team to celebrate, he noticed Ginny fly to her captain and start telling him off for suggesting she elbow Harry. She was obviously sure that was the only reason she hadn't caught

the elusive ball. He had to admit that it looked funny to see a tall 6th-year cowering away from a short 1st-year.

He found himself suddenly engulfed in a hug that lasted a second. He finally realized it was Michelle when she left to hug someone else. He then noticed a member of the reserve team flying toward him and prepared for the hug this time. Hermione held the hug for about five seconds, and when she let go, they both were blushing and looking down.

“G-Great catch,” she muttered before flying off toward the others. He did the same. Before long, the whole team – reserves included – was in a huge group hug. When they separated, the captain flew toward Aunt Minnie. There were tears in Michelle’s eyes when she took the cup from the Headmistress. He noticed Professor Flitwick nearby jumping up and down like a maniac, all dignity forgotten.

Before he landed, Ginny approached him on her broom, looking calmer. She held out her hand to him. "You beat me fair and square. I guess no one won our bet."

He shook her hand while responding, "I think you would've gotten it if you hadn't listened to that Keeper, too."

"I'll know better next year," she said before flying away toward her changing room. There was a party in Ravenclaw Tower that night.

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Exam week went well, without any surprises for the study group. Without Snape cheating, Slytherin got the lowest house points and Ravenclaw won the House Cup in addition to the Quidditch Cup. On the last day of term, Aunt Minnie told Harry, “I have managed to acquire a dozen tickets for the August 9th match in Le Mans between the Quiberon Quafflepunchers from France and the Sweetwater All-Stars from Texas. I’ve spoken to your parents as well as your closest friends’ parents. Our family, the Grangers and the Patils, including Parvati from Gryffindor, are going.”

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 22 – American Summer

"I just realized," said Harry sadly as he stepped out of the main gate of Hogwarts, "that this is the last time that this castle will be my shelter from Brianna." He had his school trunk in one hand and Hedwig's cage in another. The snowy owl did not look happy to be caged up like that, but Harry had to keep her with him so she'd get to America. All the other students were similarly loaded down with luggage.

Hermione, who was walking next to him holding her trunk that had Rowena and Crookshanks' empty cages shrunk inside it (Rowena was flying home while Crookshanks was walking beside his master), laughed with Padma while the Headmistress, who was also walking with them, said, "Harry, you shouldn't say such things. You know you miss your sister."

“Maybe,” he said with a smirk, “but I did enjoy not having to worry about her waking me up with an Aquamenti spell.”

Hermione said, "I'll make sure to let her know you miss that," with a laugh. Harry shot his best friend a quick glare before boarding a carriage.

"I'll see you at the Platform," said Aunt Minnie before turning around. "I have some duties to attend to inside the castle, but they'll be completed by the time the Hogwarts Express arrives in London. Enjoy the ride, and please, don't get into too much trouble on the train."

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Half an hour later, Harry, Hermione, Padma, Susan, Ginny, Neville, Luna and Anthony were sitting together on the Express, waiting for the snack trolley to come by. However, the snack trolley was not what approached their carriage.

“Well, well, well. What have we here?” came the nasal voice that was far too familiar to Harry.

He looked carefully at his watch as the three most annoying Slytherins came into view. "Is it already time for your daily beating, Draco?" he asked, sounding bored. "Can we make it easier this time so I don't have to get up? I'll make a fist and you run into it. Alright?"

Harry's companions laughed while Malfoy sneered, "You think you're funny, but my fath..."

Something snapped in Harry at the mention of that murderer. He jumped up and grabbed Draco by the collar, pushing him against the wall before he could react. "Your vile father didn't stop me from kicking your..."

"Harry!" admonished Hermione as she (along with their other companions) pointed her wand at Crabbe and Goyle, who looked frightened. "Language!"

"I'll call this maggot anything I feel like!" retorted Harry as he pulled back his right fist, getting ready to punch him. Draco closed his eyes with a terrified expression and didn't notice the spell Padma performed on the front of his tan pants, causing a wet spot. "I am SICK of this IDIOT!" He glared at Draco. "Why are you so stupid?! What is wrong with you? If you would just stay away, you'd have nothing to fear from me, but you won't!" Harry rammed his fist straight into Malfoy's nose, which immediately started bleeding.

"Hermione," said Harry in a mocking tone. "Look at that wonderful, pure blood! Isn't it amazing? Aren't you envious of it? Maybe we should collect some." He then pulled the crying Malfoy away from the wall and pushed him into Crabbe, who was standing in the doorway, still looking at the wands pointed at him. They both fell to the other side of the doorway, and Goyle followed them. "Now, stay away from us!" Harry slammed the door shut so hard that the glass broke, and sat down.

"Reparo!" said Hermione, sounding upset as the door fixed itself. She then rounded on her best friend. "Harry, you should not have done that! You'll get in trouble!"

He turned to her while still breathing hard. "You don't understand. That imbecile only understands one thing – pain. If he gets hurt every time he messes with us, eventually he'll stop."

"You're only letting him win by getting mad," she countered as the others remained quiet.

"No," Harry replied firmly, shaking his head. "He wins if he can say and do whatever he wants with no consequences. When we ignore him, he wins. That crying, bleeding loser did not win today."

"But he'll tell on you," said Hermione.

"He'd have made up lies about me anyway, so it doesn't matter." He took a deep breath as he calmed down. "I just want him to leave me alone."

At that moment, the door opened, revealing Percy Weasley, his prefect badge looking newly polished on his robes. He was looking very upset. "McGonagall," he said. "Mr. Malfoy said you attacked him."

"I've been here the whole trip," responded Harry. "I didn't go anywhere near his compartment."

Looking impatient, Percy responded, "He said it happened in here, so quit denying it."

"Why do you suppose the person who everyone knows to be my enemy would come to my compartment?"

"That doesn't matter, McGonagall. I've had enough of your insubordination. Do you deny hitting him like a muggle?"

"I think it does matter, Percy!" shouted Ginny, who was looking very angry at her brother, who'd completely ignored her. "That prat came in here to insult us, and got what he deserved! I only wish I'd had the chance to hex him!"

"Stay out of this, Geneva. It's none of your concern. Mr. McGonagall threw the first punch."

peril young Genevra was in earlier this year. Draco Malfoy is a bigot and a troublemaker, as well as an enemy of your family, and I've already told him that I will expel him the moment I have enough cause. He's being raised to be a Death Eater. While I agree that I need to talk to Harry about his temper, your siding with Malfoy yet again proves how poor your judgment is. I regret ever making you a prefect."

"Now, see here, Headmistress," said Percy, still being just barely civil. "Just because the boy is your nephew..."

"That has nothing to do with it, Mr. Weasley. By your own admission, Draco Malfoy went to Harry's compartment. He was obviously looking for trouble, and he found some. If Harry had gone to Draco's compartment, then it would be his fault. You get good grades, Percy. Why can't you *use your brain*?"

Harry let out a small snort that gained the attention of both Minerva and Percy. The arrogant prefect marched off without a word while Harry's aunt's eyes narrowed as her lips thinned. "Harry, what did I tell you about losing your temper?"

"That I should pull pranks and not fight."

"Exactly," she said. "You're going to have to learn to stay calm or you'll end up in trouble."

"But this was different, Aunt Minnie. Draco had no business in our compartment, and needed to be kicked out. That's our private space! If Draco ever gets in my house or Ravenclaw tower, I'll give him more of the same. He needs to learn to leave me alone! I have *never* gone looking for him!"

"I know," Minnie replied calmly, "but I still have to inform your parents."

"Come on, Aunt Minnie. There's no reason to tell them. What I can't figure out is what the point was in Percy telling on me. The year is over, so house points don't count and I can't get detention."

“For some reason, that arrogant boy hates you,” replied Minerva. “He’s almost as biased against you as Snape was. He definitely won’t be Head Boy.”

Harry laughed, "I'll bet he won't be happy." He then looked sad for a moment. "Too bad. The Weasley twins were planning on changing his Head Boy badge to say *Big-Head Boy*."

His aunt smiled for a moment. "That would be appropriate. I believe we should be going now." She then put her arm around Harry, and they both disappeared, along with his luggage, and appeared in the magical section of the airport. They then got in line for the international floor.

[illegible]

After being lovingly and cheerfully greeted at the airport in Chicago, the McGonagall family rode their car home, stopping at a McDonalds drive-through along the way. While Harry was levitating his luggage into his room, Minerva informed his parents of the altercation he had with Malfoy on the train.

“Harry Mark McGonagall!” Harry heard his mother’s voice while he was still in his room. He knew immediately what that meant. “Come down here.”

"Yes, mother," he said neutrally as he approached the staircase.

“Your aunt told me what happened on the train.”

“Oh,” he said.

“That you got in a fight.”

“That’s not true,” he replied, earning a glare from both women that made him decide to clarify his statement. “I punched that bigot once and pushed him out of my compartment while he cried. I don’t define that as a fight.”

"Good job," said Brianna with a grin.

“The point is that you are supposed to be controlling your temper,” said Cindy. Harry noticed that his father was staying silent and wondered if he actually was in favor of Harry’s actions and didn’t want to earn the wrath of the women.

Harry looked at his mother. “How would you respond if you were on a train with Mrs. Fleming and some bigot walked into your compartment proudly spouting off the ‘N’ word at her, basically saying she doesn’t have the right to exist?”

Cindy paled before stuttering, “I-I...”

“Because that’s exactly what was going on!” continued Harry, increasing his volume as he paced around the room. “Draco’s father was in Voldemort’s inner circle and is teaching his son to be a Death Eater. They are exactly the muggle equivalent of the KKK, except that they’re against muggle-borns instead of Africans, and I refuse to put up with them! My birth parents died fighting that kind of prejudice, and *I thought* you raised me not to put up with it!” He took a deep, calming breath. “I don’t go looking for fights with him, but if Malfoy comes after me, I will do the same or worse to him every time no matter how many detentions I get.”

Mark finally spoke. “The funny thing is, most of them don’t realize that they’re imitating the very muggles they hate.” He looked at his wife and aunt. “Whether or not Harry took the right action, the point is that he took action. Someone has to take action because that prejudice can’t be tolerated anymore. How many lives has it already cost the British Wizarding World because it was allowed to flourish at Hogwarts while Dumbledore was headmaster before Voldemort’s first rise? He may not be prejudiced, but he created an atmosphere at Hogwarts where prejudice thrived and spread, especially in Slytherin house under Snape.

“How many more people have to die before the bigots aren’t tolerated? I put up with them in magical society as a squib. Those people are too stupid to listen to reason and won’t look at test scores to plainly see that they aren’t superior in any way to muggle-borns, so they have to at least be taught to keep their mouths shut if they want to spew that garbage. I know that anyone stupid enough to use the

‘*N*’ word at Brianna’s school would get a well-deserved beating, so why shouldn’t the same be true about using the ‘*M*’ word at Hogwarts?”

“Mark,” said Cindy, “You can’t be condoning...”

“I hope Aunt Minnie, as headmistress, comes up with a better way to discourage prejudice, like forcing kids who use the ‘M’ word to take counseling, but something has to be done before another war starts. If Voldemort or any other Dark Lord shows up spouting that bigoted nonsense, the people who believe that will rally to his cause just like last time. Every kid allowed to act like Draco Malfoy is one more person who will join that army. Maybe if he keeps on being proven inferior while he’s still a boy, he might eventually realize that his father has fed him nothing a pack of lies and he’s superior to no one. He might even begin to use his head for something besides a target.”

Harry grinned and looked at his aunt. "I doubt they'd accept counseling, but what if they had to write a report on O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. scores between purebloods, half-bloods and muggle-borns if they're caught using that word?"

Minnie smiled at Harry. "I think that's an excellent suggestion."

They continued the discussion, and neither Harry nor (thankfully) Brianna reminded the adults that they forgot all about punishing him.

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A few days later, the adults were gone, so Brianna and Harry were playing a game of Super Mario World on their Super Nintendo. Harry was fighting the final battle with Bowser when the door opened.

“Hi, kids,” said Cindy while she, Mark and Minerva returned from some boring seminar. Harry could smell Burger King Hamburgers as the door closed.

“Hi, mom, dad, Aunt Minnie,” he said as he kept playing. The Headmistress took out her wand and banished her hat to the guest room, causing the TV screen to flicker for a moment. When the

Their dad signed Harry and Brianna in while they were chatting with the group. Harry was introduced to a few kids he didn't know. One of them, a brown-haired boy who'd moved there from Ohio named Craig, asked, "Have you ever played Quadpot?"

"No," Harry answered. "I've never heard of it."

"I have," said Brianna. "But I've never seen a game."

"Quadpot is a lot more popular than Quidditch where I come from. You play with eleven players to a side with a modified Quaffle called a Quad that explodes..."

"What?" asked Harry. "That's nuts."

"It's kind of like hot potato with an actual hot potato," said Melissa. "We played a game about a month ago. You keep passing the Quad to your teammates, trying to get it into the 'pot' at the other end of the pitch. The 'pot' is actually a cauldron containing a solution that stops the Quad from exploding."

"Hm," said Harry, not convinced that he was interested in that sport.

"It's not any worse of an explosion than you get with exploding snap," said Craig. "You wanna play?"

He looked at his sister and then at his friends before shrugging his shoulders. "I'll try one game, but I'm not convinced I'll like it."

"Fair enough."

Harry and Brianna got their brooms and followed the group to a room at FFF that they'd never been in before. It looked like any other Quidditch Pitch, except that it had floating cauldrons instead of goal. Harry mounted his Lightning Bolt and flew into the position he was told. They were all on one team and played another group that was there.

The Quad, which looked like any other Quaffle except that it was colored a different shade of red, was thrown in the middle, and Craig

caught it. He tossed it to Melissa, who tossed it toward Brianna, who tossed it to Harry.

BANG!! The Quad exploded in his face, and he had to fly back down. He decided at that moment that he didn't like Quadpot as he settled down in a corner watching the game. He soon realized that even if he hadn't been the first one out he still actually would've found it boring after a few minutes, because the players weren't actually flying around much like he preferred. They were just playing catch. He did cheer when his team got points, but he wasn't very impressed by the game. The other team members went to the other side when they lost. He laughed when Craig became the next person from his team out.

“What do you think of the game?” the teenage boy asked.

"It's alright, I suppose, but to be honest, I prefer Quidditch."

"I heard you were on a team at your school," commented Craig, nodding his head. "It's actually a bit rare for someone to enjoy both games. Most usually like one or the other."

"It's just that I really enjoy flying around a lot," he said.

“No problem. It looks like your sister will be joining us,” he said when another Quad exploded.

The other team eventually won by just a few points, and the referee performed a spell to clean off all the Quadpot victims so they didn't look like they'd been blown up before they left the room. Then they played a game of Quidditch, wherein Harry's team completely shut out the other team – a bunch of kids from a private magical school who thought they were the best team around. His catching the Snitch was actually ending the humiliation that the other team endured.

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Harry quickly got into a routine where he'd spend a few hours every day doing summer homework before playing video games or hanging out with his American friends, both muggle and magical. They weren't as close to him as before he started Hogwarts, but he still enjoyed

their company. Melissa had gotten him to blush when she asked if he was dating Hermione yet. While he was denying it, she laughed and claimed he was in denial, and his red face was proof that he liked her. He did not mention that in his nightly mirror calls with the girl in question.

Three weeks after he arrived home, Harry had completed his homework and was looking forward to his unofficial birthday the next week. Legally, Harry McGonagall's birthday was August twelfth, and that's when he got his presents, but his parents had decided they'd spend Harry Potter's birthday at Six Flags Great America. He woke up, content that he didn't have any responsibilities for the day, and took a shower.

When Harry went down the stairs for breakfast, he found his aunt sitting at the table reading the *Daily Prophet*. She'd made special arrangements for it to be sent to her in America so she could keep up with the news during her vacation.

"Anything interesting happen across the pond?" he asked.

"Actually," she said cheerfully, "yes." She then showed him the front page, which displayed a picture of the Weasley family, even Ron's rat, and said they'd won the Grand Prize Galleon Draw and were going to spend a month-long vacation in Egypt.

He grinned at this news. "That's great! It should be good for Ginny to spend time with her older brother, Bill, after what happened last year. She once said he was her favorite brother."

"Yes, it is good," his aunt agreed.

"What is?" asked Cindy as she walked into the room. After Harry explained about the Weasleys, she commented, "It's nice that they won some money, but isn't that rather foolish of them to spend it all on a vacation? As I understand it, the Weasleys don't have that much money and usually have to settle for second-hand books and uniforms for their children. Wouldn't it have been more prudent for them to get new supplies for their kids, or else to save the money for an emergency?"

Harry's eyebrows came closer together as he considered this. "I suppose you are right. When the summer's over, they won't have anything to show for all the money they won."

“Arthur is even taking a month off work,” added Minerva.

“I’m certainly not against vacations – even month-long ones – but if you can’t afford them...”

“...you shouldn’t take them,” completed Harry. His mom had always tried to teach him and Brianna to be frugal, especially after he got access to his vault, and the idea of taking an expensive trip before buying used clothes and books for your kids did seem rather foolish now that he thought it through. He wondered if that frivolity in spending was why the Weasleys were poor, and then shrugged it off, deciding it was none of his business anyway. “Oh well; I hope they have a good time.”

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On July 31st, when Harry came down for breakfast, instead of getting the expected, “Happy Birthday,” greeting, or even having the day ignored in favor of his official birthday, he found his parents and aunt all sitting in the living room with solemn expressions on their faces.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

Without a word, Minnie put a copy of the latest *Daily Prophet* in his hands. He sat down as he unrolled the newspaper. It had a picture of a deranged-looking man underneath a large headline that announced a Death Eater called Sirius Black had escaped Azkaban Prison. He looked up at the three adults, barely noticing the sounds behind him that indicated Brianna was now in the room. “Isn’t that prison supposed to be escape-proof?”

“Yes,” said Aunt Minnie. “No one’s ever escaped before. However, there’s something else about Sirius Black which isn’t common knowledge that I believe you should be aware of.”

His eyebrows shot up at that news. “Oh. What’s that?”

After taking a deep breath, Minerva said, "He's your godfather."

Harry's eyes bulged out. "What?" said both he and his sister.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Sirius and James Potter were inseparable at school – more like brothers than friends. Black was even Best Man at your birth-parents' wedding, Harry. Naturally, when you came along, he was asked to be your godfather." She then lowered her head and started blinking her eyes, obviously fighting back tears.

Harry didn't like where this story was going, but he agreed that he needed to know. "What happened? Why was he in Azkaban?"

Minerva shook her head, indicating that she wasn't ready to continue speaking. Harry's dad took over the story. "He betrayed them. He told Voldemort where you three were hiding." He took a deep breath. "He's the reason they're dead."

Harry found himself panting as though he'd just run a mile as he took this in. Before he could comment, Minnie added, "They trusted him. With their very lives." She took a deep breath and looked into her great-nephew's eyes. "In your extra studies, have you ever read about the Fidelius Charm?"

He nodded, remembering an advanced book he and Hermione had read a few months before. A light-bulb went on inside his head. "He was their Secret-Keeper, wasn't he?" he demanded. She nodded. He stood up and clenched his fists. "That son of a..."

"Harry!" interrupted his mom. "We know what he is, but you also know how I feel about swearing!"

"Would someone please explain what that charm is?" asked Brianna, "so I'll know how much I should hate him."

That comment actually caused Harry to calm down a bit, and he sat back down and explained the Fidelius Charm to his little sister.

"How could anyone betray their best friends like that?" she asked, now shedding a few tears of her own at the thought that this man had

actually betrayed her brother – his own godson – to be murdered, and only a miracle saved Harry.

“That’s not all that he did,” said Minerva, now prepared to continue the tale. “Another friend of theirs named Peter Pettigrew confronted Black the next day, so he murdered – no, destroyed – him, too, along with twelve muggles that had the bad luck of being there. All they found of Peter was...a finger.”

Minnie started to lose her composure again, so Cindy finished the story. “The aurors found him at the scene of the crime, laughing, and he’s been in Azkaban ever since.”

“He’s as bad, no worse than Voldemort,” growled Harry after a few moments. “At least Voldemort didn’t pretend to be their friend and betray them.” No one commented on this analysis.

Finally, Aunt Minnie spoke again. “Mr. Dumbledore contacted me a few minutes before you came down here. With his position in the Wizengamot, he’s privy to certain information, and he thought we should know that for the last couple days, the guards of Azkaban had been hearing Black repeat the words *He’s at Hogwarts* over and over in his sleep. The Ministry believes that he’s going after Harry Potter, and isn’t aware that his godson is missing.”

After about ten seconds of silence, Brianna asked, “There’s no way he could know who Harry really is, is there?”

“No,” insisted the boy in question. “Aside from you guys, only Hermione, Fred, George, Padma and Dumbledore know. None of them would’ve gone to Azkaban and visited a Death Eater to tell him where to find me.”

“I would tend to agree,” said Minerva. “So you should be safe to go to Hogwarts as well as Hogsmeade.” She turned toward Mark and Cindy. “By the way, I have his permission form to visit the village in my room.” They nodded and she looked back at her nephew. “By the way, although it might not be the best time to say it, happy birthday.”

He grinned a bit while everyone repeated the phrase to him. His father finally said, “If we’re going to get to Six Flags early, we’d better

leave. I'll bet anything Black wouldn't think to look for you there." This seemed to lighten the mood, and soon they were on their way to a fun-filled day.

[illegible]

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 23 – European Summer

The trip to Great America was very similar to the one from the previous year, with two exceptions. One is that the Grangers weren't there, and the second is that Brianna was now tall enough to ride the exciting rollercoasters, which she made sure to do. Just as last year, neither Harry's dad nor Aunt Minnie went on the thrilling rides.

Aside from the lines at the best rollercoasters, it was a very fun-filled day, and the topic of Sirius Black didn't come up for the rest of Harry Potter's birthday.

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A few days later, the McGonagall kids were taken to the dentist and eye doctor, although this time, they decided to use the magical eye doctor when Harry mentioned, "I've been thinking about getting contact lenses, and I heard the magical ones are better. Last week, Paul Grabowski told me that a few years ago, a muggle-born became an eye healer and developed magical contact lenses. They aren't too popular among the purebloods and older wizards, but a lot of muggle-borns get them and haven't had any complaints. Paul hardly knows he's wearing them."

They made an appointment for both kids with the eye healer in Little Salem, and so the McGonagall family found itself standing outside of a building with a sign that showed a pair of brown eyes moving around, apparently looking at everybody. Underneath them it said *Healer Eugene's Eye Examinations*. "Well, this is the place," said Mark as he opened the door.

Although there was no bell on the door, they heard a distinct ring as they walked inside. The walls were lined with shelves full of glasses of all shapes and sizes. There was even a shelf with magical eyes spinning around. Harry looked around in fascination, noticing a sign that advertised special features available for all glasses and contact lenses. These included night vision, the ability to see through any object, the ability to see through invisibility cloaks, and a zooming in feature.

A voice asking, “May I help you?” pulled Harry from his browsing. He turned to see a young dark-skinned witch in a yellow robe looking at his parents.

Cindy answered, “Yes. We have an appointment for both our children – Harry and Brianna McGonagall – to have their eyes checked. So far, Brianna hasn’t needed glasses, and Harry is interested in getting contact lenses.”

The receptionist turned her attention to Harry and seemed to be staring at his eyes. “Yes,” she commented. “I can see why you don’t want to hide those lovely green eyes of yours, young man. I’ll bet all the girls will enjoy staring into them.” Harry blushed at this statement, but didn’t respond. They were then given roles of parchment to fill out.

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Harry's appointment was first, so he walked into the office where the eye healer was waiting for him. The friendly wizard said, "I understand that this is your first magical eye exam," after glancing at a role of parchment.

"Yes," he responded, suddenly a bit nervous.

“Well, this exam is much easier than the muggle ones where you have to keep choosing what looks better or worse. I just perform a few spells on your eyes. You won’t feel a thing.”

“Alright.”

“Now, just take off your glasses.”

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About twenty minutes later, Harry left the office with a big smile on his face and his old glasses in his pocket.

"Harry," said Cindy, "Did you already get your contact lenses?"

“Yes,” he replied happily. “He told me that I don’t have to take them off at all, and a sticking charm is making sure they’ll never accidentally come off. There’s just a spell I need to perform on my eyes every day for about a month to moisturize them, until they’re used to the contacts. He said that muggle contact lens eye drops could be used two or three times a day instead of the spell, if for some reason I couldn’t perform it.”

Cindy looked her son in the eyes. "I agree with the receptionist," she whispered. "The girls will like seeing your eyes."

"Mom!" he hissed.

“Especially Hermione.” He blushed and turned away from his mother, just in time to see Brianna walk into the office.

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When Brianna returned, she heard her brother arguing with their mother. “But mom, I think that feature would be great.”

“Maybe so, dear, but I don’t think the girls at Hogwarts will appreciate you having x-ray vision.”

“They don’t need to know...”

“That’s final, Harry.”

“Fine,” he said in a huff that Brianna could tell was fake. She realized that Harry was just having fun – trying to get a reaction from their mother. She knew he never expected to get contact lenses that see through everything. “Can I get the other features?” he asked.

“Maybe next year we’ll get you one,” she said, “but not this year.” She then turned to face her daughter. “How’d it go? Are your eyes still perfect?”

"Always," Brianna admitted with a grin.

"Lucky," commented Harry, causing his sister to stick out her tongue.

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'This is Privet Drive,' the traveler thought to himself as he looked up at the street sign. He had looked up his destination in the local Felytone book, and was now searching for Number 4. Aside from the addresses, it was nearly impossible to tell one house from the other in this boring neighborhood. He peered through the window and saw an overly large man with a bushy mustache sitting down at the dinner table with his horse-faced (yet familiar-looking) wife, a boy who appeared to be the size of a small whale, and a dog-faced woman.

The stranger watched and waited, hiding behind a bush to avoid being noticed by the neighbors. His black fur helped him to remain unnoticed. The bulky man and dog-faced woman both consumed an exorbitant amount of alcohol while the stranger kept quietly waiting for his opportunity to find out if his godson was there. Finally, the intoxicated adults, as well as the fat kid, left the room and went up the stairs, leaving the horse-faced woman who he'd seen with Lily at Kings Cross Station years before alone to wash the dishes. The escaped prisoner of Azkaban morphed into a man and walked up to the door.

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“Hermione! It’s great to see you!” Harry exclaimed as he was suddenly embraced by his best friend. Much to his surprise, the Grangers were waiting at the airport when his family floo’d to England. It was a few days before the August 9th Quidditch match in France.

"It's good to see you, too!" she exclaimed. "You look good without those glasses," she blurted out before both of them blushed and released each other.

“Aren’t you gonna kiss?” asked Brianna, earning a glare from her brother, who then turned to greet Hermione’s parents, who welcomed them all back to England.

“We should be going,” said Minerva. “Adam, Marissa, will you join us for dinner?”

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After spending an hour at a fancy restaurant with the Grangers, the McGonagall family made their way to their family manor. They'd only been there for a few minutes when the floo activated and the face of a wizened old wizard with white hair and beard, which, from that perspective, seemed to be on fire, appeared. Harry, who was closest to the fireplace, found the sight amusing, but managed to avoid laughing.

“Greetings, Mr. Potter,” he politely said to the teenager.

“Hello, Mr. Dumbledore,” he said noncommittally, not sure how he should respond to his former headmaster. “If you don’t mind, sir, I prefer McGonagall.”

“Very well, Mr. McGonagall,” he replied with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Thank you." He decided to add, "Thanks for keeping my secret."

"It's no bother."

“Albus,” said Minerva, who just approached. “Is something wrong?”

"I'm afraid so," he nodded grimly. "Sirius Black paid the Dursleys a visit today."

“WHAT?” exclaimed all the McGonagalls at once.

Harry sadly asked, "Are they...dead?"

“Fortunately, no,” answered the former headmaster. “I placed wards on their house to alert me if a wizard were to approach their property. When I got there, he had just left Petunia Dursley, who was very upset. He’d questioned her about Harry Potter’s whereabouts, and determined that she’d been obliviated, but not that I had done it. He screamed at Mrs. Dursley and left.”

“But he wasn’t able to learn anything to lead him to Harry?” asked Cindy.

“No,” said Dumbledore. “And I obliviated Mrs. Dursley of the entire incident.”

“Why didn’t he kill her?” asked Harry’s sister.

“Brianna!” yelled Mark. “You should never wish someone dead!”

“I wasn’t wishing her dead,” she argued. “I simply was curious why he didn’t kill her, since he didn’t have any problem with killing before.”

Albus said, “Young Miss McGonagall does raise a good question that I can’t readily answer. Perhaps he sensed that he had tripped a ward and knew he didn’t have time.”

The conversation went on for a little while after that, and finally Dumbledore's head returned to the other end of the floo call.

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The next day, the family met up with the Grangers in Diagon Alley for school shopping. Brianna still had her brown eagle owl, Barnabus, so she didn't get a new pet. Hermione already had both an owl and a cat, so she wasn't getting any new pets either. Therefore, they only picked up pet supplies without taking long to look at the animals.

Officially, Brianna had left her Silver Bullet broom in America, since she couldn't bring it to Hogwarts anyway. Unofficially, Harry had it hidden with his stuff, since he still owed her for helping him smuggle in his Lightning Bolt during his first year. In any case, they did look at the Quidditch supplies, noticing the Nimbus 2001's, and Harry got a new pair of Seeker gloves, as well as a new broom service kit.

They went into Flourish and Blotts next, and after Brianna had gotten her books, Hermione still wanted to stay there browsing. The Grangers stayed there with their daughter, as well as Harry, while the rest of the McGonagalls went off to other stores after Brianna wished Harry and Hermione to, “Enjoy your date,” causing them to blush.

Once they were out of that store, Brianna surprised her parents and aunt by asking, "Can I get a new wand at Ollivanders?"

"Are you having trouble with your old one?" asked Cindy.

“No, but Harry...”

“Harry’s first wand didn’t entirely suit him,” said Minerva.

“But it still worked for him,” argued Brianna. “I thought I could get one as a spare just like him.”

Mark looked at his wife, who shrugged her shoulders. "Alright, but that'll be the only extra thing we're getting you."

She pulled two galleons out of her pocket and asked, "Is this enough to get a holster like Harry's?"

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In the meantime, both third-years had picked out extra books and purchased them. They left the book store and walked around the alley, with Hermione's parents staying back a bit to give them privacy.

"I wish Brianna would stop saying stuff like that."

Hermione looked slightly hurt, but Harry didn't see her face since they were both walking. "Is the idea of dating me that horrible?"

Harry's eyes widened as his face paled. "I, No, I didn't mean...um. I didn't mean anything against you. It's just that if I, um, we wanted to date, we could handle it ourselves and not need her pushing us to do it." He then quickly added, "I'm, er, not entirely opposed to the idea. I'd just prefer it to be my idea."

"Really?" she asked, sounding neutral.

He cleared his throat. “Maybe if I decided I, er, wanted to date, y’know...theoretically.”

“Theoretically?” she repeated.

He swallowed before saying, “Yeah. What store do we need to visit next?” he asked, quite obviously changing the subject before walking a bit faster.

Sighing, she answered, "We should pick up more C.A.R.E. badges."

“Good idea.”

Harry acted a bit awkward for the rest of the day until they met up with the rest of the McGonagalls, where they found that Brianna had managed to talk Ollivander into selling her a wand and holster. Soon after that, they went to their respective houses. That night, when Harry and Hermione had their usual mirror-call, they both acted normally again, completely ignoring the conversation they'd had earlier in the day.

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"It's time to get up."

Blinking as his groggy head began to clear, Harry focused his eyes on the person who had just shaken him awake – his dad. He blinked again and slightly smiled at the fact that his father's face was not blurry. He'd only had his magical contacts for less than two weeks, and still wasn't used to being able to see properly. He summoned his wand and performed the moisturizing spell on his eyes as he said, "Alright. I'm up."

Fifteen minutes later, Harry, with his hair still wet from the shower, arrived in the common room of his family's manor. The three adult occupants were sitting on the sofa.

“Good morning, Harry.”

"Morning, Aunt Minnie."

“Mornin’ everyone,” said Brianna, as she walked into the room stifling a yawn.

“How long until the Portkey activates?” asked Harry.

The group had no trouble finding their tents amongst the others, once they'd been pointed in the right direction. The only problem Harry had was the way that many of the tents were decorated. France's team, the Quiberon Quafflepunchers' colors were pink and dark red, and consequently, many of the tents were decked out in those colors. However, adding to the problem was the fact that the opposing team – the Sweetwater All-Stars from Texas, U.S.A. – had for their team colors bright red and white. Harry thought they should have a bit of blue as well to complete the colors of the American flag, but it wasn't to be. As a result of this, over eighty percent of the tents were either covered in pink or red decorations, and Harry put on a pair of sunglasses in an effort to protect his eyes.

"Gabrielle, zis 'as got to be ze most beautiful campsite I have ever zeen," said a tall, silver-blonde, beautiful girl who appeared to be about sixteen years old. Her family was camped next to the three tents for Harry's group. There was something special about her that seemed to draw Harry toward her.

A little girl who looked similar to the older one said, "Yez, Fleur, eet iz magnificent!"

"Harry!" A hand on his right arm pulled him out of his trance. He blinked his eyes for a moment before turning to face his best friend. She said, "What's wrong? Why are you walking toward that tent? Do you know that girl?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head. "I don't know what came over me."

Hermione tentatively asked, "Do you think she's...pretty?"

"I suppose," he replied as he watched his friend frown for a moment, "but I honestly didn't know I was even walking. It's like I was in a daze or something. Let's get back to the others," he said, turning around and walking away, eager to get away from whatever caused his temporary trance.

Hermione stood there for a few moments looking downcast before the older French girl walked up to her and held out her hand to shake hers. "Hello. My name iz Fleur Delacour. Waz zat your boyfriend?"

Politely, Hermione shook Fleur's hand as she blushed slightly, saying, "I'm Hermione Granger. Harry's not my boyfriend. We're just good friends."

“But you wish he waz. I can tell.”

Hermione looked at the ground. “I...”

“I believe I should explain what ‘appened to him a moment ago.” The French girl looked a bit uncomfortable at this point, but continued speaking. “You zee, I am part Veela. Do you know what zat means?” Hermione nodded. She had read about them. “I ztill ‘aven’t gotten ze effects under control. Frequently, when I am near any male, zay temporarily fall under ze trance.” She took a deep breath. “Do not blame him. Eet wasn’t his fault. I am zorry for any distress eet caused you. Eet waz an accident.”

Hermione slightly smiled at this news, understanding the powers that Veelas had. "I understand."

"I also think I should point out zat 'e waz taken out of his trance ze moment you touched him. Do you know what zat means?"

Hermione blushed once more as she nodded, keeping silent.

Fleur smiled at the British girl. "He may be in denial, but only one thing can break ze trance like zat. Ze boy iz zmitten with you."

“Th-thanks,” Hermione stammered.

“Ez ze truth. You zhould go to him.”

"Yeah," Hermione agreed and turned.

“By ze way, welcome to France.”

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Shortly after that conversation, Hermione informed Harry that he'd fallen under an accidental Veela spell, but didn't mention the rest of

her conversation with Fleur. Shortly after that, the group wound up going souvenir shopping. The American McGonagalls decided to support the Sweetwater All-Stars, so Mark, Cindy, Harry and Brianna (along with Parvati) all got huge red cowboy-style hats with 'Sweetwater' written in white letters across the front. The Grangers, on the other hand, who had vacationed in France more than once, bought three pink berets advertising the Quiberon Quafflepunchers (or Quafflepoofters as Harry called them, earning both laughs and glares from his mixed group), although Adam wouldn't put his on and gave it to Padma. The others didn't buy any hats. However, everyone got a pair of Omnioculars so they could see the match.

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“Welcome, everyone, to ze match between ze home team – ze Quiberon Quafflepunchers!” Loud cheers come from the majority of the stadium, including Hermione, as Harry watched the team, clad in shocking pink uniforms with red capes fly in formation while the three Chasers juggled six Quaffles between them.

He muttered his made-up word, “Quafflepoofers,” while the names were announced, earning yet another glare from his best friend.

“Even you’ve got to admit they’re obviously very skilled with Quaffles,” she hissed.

"I know," he admitted, "but they're wearing pink uniforms."

The team finally arrived in the center of the pitch, so the announcer called out. “And now ze challengers! Coming all ze way from America – Ze Zweetwater All-Ztarz!”

Harry rolled his eyes at the mispronunciation of the Texas team's name, but joined in the applause as they flew into the pitch, every one of them doing magical rope tricks, shooting them out of their wands and making lassos of all shapes and sizes while their names were announced.

Hermione commented, "Their uniforms look almost exactly like the Gryffindor ones, aside from the cowboy boots."

He nodded. "I noticed. Too bad they didn't choose blue instead."

"Look at their brooms," exclaimed Brianna, who was on Harry's other side. "They're all on Silver Bullets!"

After using his Omnioculars to get a closer look, Harry nodded. "You're right." With a smirk, he added, "They must not have heard of Lightning Bolts in Texas."

After the extra Quaffles (as well as the wands) were put away, the balls were brought out. The Snitch disappeared almost immediately and the Bludgers started moving away; the Quaffle was tossed into the air as the announcer said, "Let ze match begin!"

Harry had never seen a truly professional Quidditch match before, and he was amazed at how quickly the French Chasers grabbed the Quaffle and took off toward their goal, passing it seamlessly between them.

"It lookz like zey're going to..." SMACK! "Zat Bludger muzt 'ave hurt! Ze All-Ztarz have pozzezion."

For hours and hours they watched as the highly skilled players moved the Quaffle and Bludgers around the pitch, demonstrating several amazing Quidditch moves in the process, but one thing was missing.

"Where is the Snitch?" commented Harry. "It hasn't shown up once."

"That is a good point," said Hermione. "The game started at noon, and now it's six o'clock."

Already, this was the longest Quidditch match Harry had ever seen, but it was an exciting one. The score was now 380 to 410, in favor of the Quafflepunchers, who were frequent winners of their league. Harry still couldn't understand how the male members of that team could wear those pink uniforms. They must be paid extra for that.

Apparently, the announcer and referee agreed that the game had been going on too long, because when the next goal was reached, there was a time-out, during which it was announced, "Az ze Znitch

has not yet shown itself, at this time, the players will be substituted so that they can rest. If the game is still going on in six hours, the original players will return. At this time, meals will be made available through our vendors."

"I didn't realize that this game would take so long," said Adam Granger.

"Neither did I," replied Minerva, "Although I have heard of a match taking as long as ten hours."

They found themselves more comfortable after the Patil parents performed cushioning spells on the seats. As soon as the vendors apparated onto the stands with sandwiches, they were swamped with orders. Harry's dad was the one stuck waiting in that line while the game resumed.

It was a half-hour later when Harry proclaimed, "There's the Snitch!" as he pointed toward France's goals.

Hermione turned her Omnioculars in that direction and said, "You're right. Maybe the game will end."

"Not likely," said Brianna, as she pointed at the Seekers, one of whom (the Sweetwater All-Star) was successfully pulling off a Wronski Feint as the other followed.

Just as the French Seeker slammed into the ground, Harry exclaimed, "The Snitch is gone again!"

After the teams changed again with the score at 780 to 760 (in favor of Texas), Harry announced, "I'm tired. Wake me up if someone sees the Snitch."

The group started sleeping in shifts with the players as the game dragged on and on. Scourgify spells were applied to everyone on a daily basis, but they weren't nearly as good as showers. They couldn't go to their campsite because of a rule that stated that if you left the stadium in the middle of a game, you couldn't return. On the fourth day, right after it was announced that this game has become the longest in history, Blinky, the McGonagall house elf, popped right

in front of the tired group holding a chocolate frosted cake with thirteen lit candles.

“It is being Master Harry’s birthday today, and Blinky is thinking that if he’s not home, he should still be celebrating!” The house elf did know that Harry McGonagall was really Harry Potter, but also understood that his secret must be preserved, and part of that was maintaining his fake birthday. Besides, Harry was still in America on his real birthday, so the elf couldn’t have done anything for him then.

“Thank you, Blinky,” the ‘birthday boy’ responded with a grin. He was unable to say anything else as his group began singing the birthday song to him, causing his face to turn red, especially when people sitting nearby noticed and joined in the singing. Finally, he said, “I wish someone would catch that Snitch,” and successfully blew out all the candles, earning a round of applause. By this time, the scores were in the thousands, yet still close enough that whoever caught the Snitch would win the game.

“You weren’t supposed to say your wish out loud,” scolded Hermione.

“Yeah,” agreed Brianna. “Now it won’t come true.”

Blinky snapped her fingers and the candles disappeared. She snapped them again, and the cake disappeared at the same moment that small plates, each with a piece of the cake, appeared in each party-member’s hand, along with a fork. Once anyone finished their cake, a chocolate Sundae with whipped cream and nuts would replace it. While they were eating, the Snitch appeared again, but the blind Seekers (at least they were blind according to Harry) didn’t notice it. This was more frustrating to him than the Hogwarts games he’d watched in first year before Gryffindor and Ravenclaw had decent Seekers.

It wasn’t until the next day – the fifth day of the match – that the Snitch appeared right in front of the Sweetwater All-Star Seeker. He grabbed it, finally ending the match.

“And Texaz finally wins ze game – 2080 to 1990! Thank Merlin! The game iz over!”

At that announcement, about half of the spectators apparated on the spot, causing a very loud 'CRACK.' When they returned to the campsite, all three families decided that they didn't want to spend another night there, so they made their way back home. Hermione, however, made it a point to say goodbye to Fleur Delacour while they were packing up the campsite.

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A few days after the match, an angry-looking Aunt Minnie walked into the kitchen, where the rest of the family was eating lunch. They all stopped and looked at her expectantly.

"I've just been speaking to that dolt we have for a Minister! He has just informed me that Dementors will be guarding Hogwarts!"

“Dementors!” repeated Mark. “He can’t be serious!”

“He is convinced that Sirius Black will be visiting Hogwarts, and hasn’t given me any choice but to allow those foul creatures to surround the school. He has assured me that they won’t cross the boundaries, but I don’t trust those...things.” She turned to her niece and nephew. “I’d like to begin teaching you two how to repel a Dementor if they come near you, and the new defense teacher will continue the lessons once school starts.” Harry looked like he was about to speak when she interrupted. “Yes, Harry; you can invite Hermione and Padma here for the lessons.”

“Good. Um, you said we’re having a new teacher?”

“Yes. Professor Tutamun was offered a consulting job in the Ministry, so I had to replace her. Professor Kettleburn also retired, so I offered his class to Madam Grubbly-Plank. She accepted. The new head of Slytherin will be Professor Vector. Oh, and Mr. Shapon has agreed to stay on as Transfiguration teacher permanently.”

"Padma'll like that," commented Harry.

“What is it you’ll be teaching us?” asked Brianna.

“The Patronus Charm.”

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Bye the way, the game they watched was talked about in ‘*Quidditch
Through the Ages.*’

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 24 –Dementors, Boggarts and Seers – Oh My!

“Expecto patronum!” exclaimed Harry for the sixth time in the last hour. It was the second day of Patronus lessons, and he was in the common room at McGonagall Manor with Hermione, Padma, Brianna and Aunt Minnie. So far, none of the students had gotten any results, no matter what memory they used. Harry had tried concentrating on birthday parties, Quidditch matches, trips to Six Flags, finding out he was magical and seeing his parents after a semester at Hogwarts, but none of them worked. This time, he focused on the Sorting Hat announcing he'd be in Ravenclaw, the same house that Hermione had been sorted into moments before. For a split second, there was a white flash from his wand.

“That’s very good, Harry!” said Minnie. “Very good, indeed.”

“Yeah,” said Brianna sarcastically. “Now you have an alternate spell to *Lumos*.” The girl’s wand lit up from the light spell, which she’d learned previously at the American magic school.

“Ha Ha!” grumbled Harry, before trying again. Although he wouldn’t admit it out loud, he had realized that thoughts of Hermione seemed to be more powerful than other, so he remembered her hugging him when his family arrived in England just over a week before. Subconsciously, he glanced at the object of his recollection, but was only noticed by Hermione, who said nothing while her eyebrows furrowed for a moment as Harry said, *“Expecto Patronum!”*

This time, a white, misty shield seemed to come out of his wand and lasted for about five seconds before fading. Harry noticed that holding it was draining. He was starting to sweat, as well as pant, with the effort. “Excellent!” proclaimed his aunt just before Harry dropped his wand, clearly exhausted.

He was bending over to pick it up when he heard his best friend repeat the same incantation he had, with identical results. “Well, done, Hermione!” he said between breaths.

“You, too,” she replied just before her shield faded.

Harry could see that she was just as drained as he, so he suggested, "Maybe we could take a break."

"Yes," agreed Minerva. "You two have probably done all you can for the day. Good job, both of you. Take the rest of the lesson off, while the other two keep trying."

The two friends walked into the library that Hermione always insisted on visiting whenever she was in this house and were looking at the books, trying to decide what to read when a pecking noise got their attention. "It looks like someone's sent a letter," commented Harry needlessly as he walked toward the closed window and welcomed a rather unusual owl with huge blood-shot eyes that looked slightly out of focus. It was a rather petite brown owl, but along with a rolled up scroll, it carried the scent of cooking sherry as it flew in a slow, erratic, zig-zag pattern, finally hovering in front of Harry's face and slowly sticking its right leg out.

Harry untied the scroll as he called, "Blinky."

"Yes, Master Harry," the elf said after popping into the room.

"Could you bring an owl treat for this bird?"

"Yes."

Before the elf disappeared, Hermione added, "And maybe something to sober the poor thing up."

Blinky popped away and returned about ten seconds later. "This owl treat is being dipped in sobering potion." Harry could see that it was in fact dripping with something as he took the owl treat. He was actually surprised that the owl ate it, but it did. He grinned when its eyes got a bit more focused before it flew off.

After both the owl and house elf were gone, Hermione asked, "Who would get an owl drunk?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I'd guess it was Professor Trelawney."

She looked offended. "I know you don't think much of..."

“I was right,” Harry interrupted. “The note’s from her.”

“Maybe the owl accidentally got into her stock,” Hermione mumbled as Harry read his note.

Dear Mr. McGonagall,

The fates have informed me that you are still in grave danger of making a horrible mistake, despite my earlier warning. I sense that someone close to you, that you admire, has turned you away from the noble art of Divination with blasphemous lies. This person has not been blessed with the great gift as you and I have been, and therefore denies that the gift exists out of jealousy.

You have been gifted with the Sight and should not allow others to force you to turn your back on this privilege and responsibility. I fear that if you do not sign up for Divination, that you will regret it. Without this important instruction, the crystal ball has shown me a Grim in your future.

With love,

Professor Sybil Trelawney,

Great-Great-Granddaughter of the great Seer – Cassandra Trelawney

Harry couldn’t help bursting out laughing. “She is sooooooooo full of crap!” He handed his companion the letter as he continued his uncontrolled mirth.

“She really is laying it on a bit thick, isn’t she?” Hermione said with no emotion.

“A bit thick?”

“She even insulted her boss – your aunt – in this letter.”

“I know,” he said, still smiling. “Do you suppose I should reply?”

“I guess it’s only polite,” said Hermione thoughtfully.

“New Sparks,” Harry muttered, summoning his wand from its holster. “Accio, parchment.” Once a fresh role of parchment flew to his hand from his room, Harry summoned a pen and began his response.

Dear Professor Trelawney,

I appreciate your advice, but have decided not to pursue mastery of the subject of Divination, as I’m sure you already know. Although my aunt lacks appreciation for your subject, she has never spoken rudely of you, and I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t make not-so-hidden rude comments about my aunt. I haven’t shown her the letter, but I doubt she would appreciate what you said.

This is the second time you’ve contacted me on the subject, and I’d appreciate it if you would respect my decision and make no further attempts to change my mind.

Sincerely,

Harry McGonagall

“What do you think?” asked Harry after showing the letter to his best friend.

“I think it’s polite enough, yet firm.”

“Good.” He took a deep breath. “I’m almost afraid to send Hedwig to Trelawney.”

Hermione was smiling again, remembering the drunken owl. “I know what you mean, but she’s a smart owl. Just tell her not to accept anything from the professor and fly right back, promising an extra treat.”

They walked slowly toward Harry’s bedroom in the manor talking when Brianna came up quickly behind them smiling, with a tablet in her hands.

“Hi guys, I hope I didn’t interrupt anything,” she said with a wink.

would be much more difficult to do that if an actual Dementor were nearby. "Watch out for your sister," said his mom, getting his attention. Their dad had been called into work the day before.

"I will," vowed Harry, turning toward Brianna. "No one can pick on her but me," he added with a smirk.

"I don't need you to watch out for me," declared Brianna defiantly.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe. Maybe not. I'll say one thing, though. If Draco tries to mess with you, I will once more kick his..."

"Harry!" interrupted Cindy McGonagall. "I don't want to hear about you fighting anymore."

"Then tell Aunt Minnie to stop calling you," he answered with a grin.

"I mean it," she said sternly. Her expression softened after a moment. She hugged him and whispered in his ear, "Be careful, Harry. I know Hogwarts is supposed to be safe from that...man who betrayed your birth-parents, and he shouldn't know who you are anyway, but please try to stay safe."

"I will, mom," he replied as he hugged her back.

"I love you," she said when they separated.

Looking uncomfortably at the ground, he muttered, "Iuvutoo."

Cindy smiled, knowing that her son in all but blood did love her, but, like most boys his age, was uncomfortable expressing that, especially in a public place like this where his friends were likely to see him. She turned to her daughter. "I love you, too, Brianna."

"I love you, too," she replied.

"Don't get into too much trouble."

"No more than Harry gets into," she said with a mischievous grin. "I have to get the American invasion of Hogwarts back on track."

Cindy couldn't help but chuckle and shake her head. "I want you to call me as soon as you get to your dorm tonight and tell me all about the train ride and where you get sorted."

Harry coughed at that moment, but it sounded suspiciously like, "Slytherin."

Brianna glared at her brother, but didn't comment.

"I guess we should get on the train," said Harry, causing Cindy to hug Brianna and wish them a good trip.

"Come on, sis," Harry said, determined to watch out for his sister, at least until she had a group of friends to watch out for her. "Let's find a compartment."

They boarded the mostly-empty train with their trunks and owls, and quickly found an empty compartment. After getting the luggage put up properly, Harry noticed his sister looking around the train, as though trying to memorize it. She'd seen the outside a few times, but never the inside of the locomotive.

"So, what do you think of the train?"

"It's alright," she replied before settling down. The faint blush on her cheeks indicated that she realized he'd caught her gazing at the Hogwarts Express. Her voice lowered to a whisper. "Are you sure you've got my broom with you?"

"Of course not," he said with a smirk. "You do know that according to the rules..."

"I'll take that as a yes," she replied.

"I don't know *what* you're talking about," he said while grinning. At that time, the door swung open, revealing, "Hermione!"

"Hi, Harry, Brianna!" she said enthusiastically while doing her best to get her trunk, owl cage and cat cage into the compartment. Harry quickly got up and helped her. It started raining heavily outside just before Padma joined them, followed soon after by Neville and Luna

so that there was no room by the time Ginny showed up. Her family always arrived at the last minute, so she had to find another compartment just before the train started moving.

About ten minutes into the journey, the compartment door swung open yet again, revealing Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle. "Well, what do we have here?" drawled the ringleader.

Brianna turned to her brother, "Are those the three squibs you mentioned, Harry?"

"Yes," he replied, "but you forget to mention their considerably low I.Q. levels."

"What are you talking about?" yelled Draco, "and who is that first-year girl?"

"See what we mean?" said Hermione to Brianna. "Complete lack of reasoning abilities."

Harry's sister seemed to be pondering that for a few moments while scratching her chin. "They would make excellent additions to the Lincoln Park Zoo."

"SHUT UP!" yelled Draco as his face turned red. His two companions were just staring stupidly at them.

"That is a good point, Brianna. I didn't think they were good for anything, but they would fit in well at the monkey house."

"Brianna?" repeated Malfoy. "You're Harry's sister, aren't you?"

The girl glared at the boy she'd heard a lot about. "And you're Malfoy, the boy Harry has been beating up regularly."

He glared at her with contempt before saying, "You're brave now, surrounded by others, but you won't always be. You'll need to *learn* to respect your betters."

Harry felt that his promise to watch out for Brianna was more important than his promise to stay out of trouble. Consequently, after

careful consideration, he made the only reasonable decision that he could. While his face was still turning red, he leapt up and ran right into Malfoy, grabbing each of his arms by the miniature bicep, and slammed him into a wall. Hermione and the others quickly had their wands pointed at the Crabbe and Goyle. Harry was squeezing Draco's arms while glaring in his nemesis' face with more venom than ever before. He visibly paled.

In a calm, but deadly tone of voice, Harry promised, "If you put one finger on her, if you cast one spell at her, no school rules will stop me from making you regret it. You will beg me to kill you before it's over." He then pushed the panicked-looking Malfoy out the door and released him, causing Draco to start rubbing his arms. He then looked at Draco's bodyguards. "And that goes for you, too! Now, get out before you get hexed!"

Looking at the enraged expression on Harry's face, as well as the wands that were still pointed at them, Dumb and Dumber left and Harry closed the door.

"You didn't have to do that, Harry. I can take care of myself," said Brianna.

Harry took a deep breath, calming down a bit as he sat down. "I'm sure you can handle your problems, but those goons are mine." He looked at her seriously. "If they start any trouble at all with you, I want you to tell me."

"So you can get in trouble for..."

"Exactly," said Harry. "They are my trouble, not yours." He added with a smirk, "I'm sure you'll come up with your own trouble soon enough."

"At least this time you didn't hit him," said Hermione, "so I don't think you can get in trouble."

The trip went without incident from the time Malfoy and his goons left until about a half-hour before they should've arrived at the school. The train lurched to a halt, and the air suddenly became colder. Harry noticed the window was frosting over as he heard a door nearby open.

He shivered as he felt a sudden chill and noticed he wasn't the only one.

"Something's come aboard," said Hermione.

"I wonder if," said Harry before his attention was taken by their door being opened. He began to feel all his happiness drain from his body, and saw the black-cloaked figure as it seemed to look at them, although he knew this creature couldn't see. He realized that for the first time in his life, he was facing a Dementor. "New Sparks," he whispered, summoning his favorite wand, just before he began to hear a woman screaming in the background.

Despite the cold, Harry was sweating profusely as he felt more and more joy leave his body.

"Not Harry! Kill me instead!" the woman pleaded. The only response he heard was hideous laughter.

Shaking his head and trying to maintain his consciousness despite the dark creature that was towering over him, he pointed his wand. *"Expecto Patronum,"* he managed to enunciate, and he heard three female voices pronounce the same incantation he had. The shield of dim light he'd formed was joined by two others, and the Dementor moved back a few feet so he could focus more. He distinctly heard his sister cursing faintly in the background and realized that she hadn't even produced a spark with her attempt. Harry's Patronus faded, so he quickly conjured another one before the monster could get to them.

The Boy-Who-Lived-In-Secret felt his magic drain and was panting heavily. He knew he wouldn't be able to fight the Dementor much longer. Glancing at Hermione and Padma, he could tell they were all experiencing the same problem. The Dementor moved forward again and held out its hand, swiping Harry's shield away.

"Expecto Patronum!" called a man's voice from outside the compartment, and suddenly a silver-white creature shaped like some sort of dog came charging at the Dementor from behind. Harry jumped to the side, afraid the monster would be pushed onto him, but

needn't have bothered because the corporeal Patronus circled around the creature and corralled it out of the compartment.

Still very shaken up, Harry unsteadily got back to his seat. He was still panting when a wizard with shabby-looking robes and a kind face, obviously their protector, walked into their compartment. "Are you alright?" he asked with a concerned expression.

"Y-yeah," said Harry, looking around at everyone. "We are now. Thanks, um..."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Where are my manners? I'm Professor Lupin, your new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. And you are?" At that moment, the teacher looked into Harry's eyes with interest.

"I'm Harry." The professor's eyes widened for some reason. "Harry McGonagall." The professor's complexion paled slightly, but he turned to the others, putting a smile back on his face.

"Hermione Granger."

"Neville Longbottom, sir."

"Padma Patil."

"Brianna McGonagall – Harry's sister."

They turned their attention to Luna, who was staring at the professor with a blank expression. "Something about Harry surprised you," she stated nonchalantly.

"What? No, I mean, Harry just reminds me someone I knew a long time ago. That's all. I didn't catch your name, Miss..."

"Luna Lovegood. But most people call me Loony."

"Only pompous gits!" added Neville.

Remus Lupin replied, "He's right, Miss Lovegood. Don't pay any attention to them." He then reached into his pocket and pulled out an enormous chocolate bar and started breaking it in pieces as they

watched in silence. When he was finished, he started handing it out. “Here, eat this. It helps people recover from meeting a Dementor.”

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It was about a half-hour later that the train pulled into Hogsmeade Station. It was still raining hard, so Harry, yet again, was glad he wasn't wearing glasses anymore. He still had to apply the moisturizing spell to his eyes every morning, but that was a lot better than having to walk with glasses in the rain. He wouldn't have been able to see at all. His robe was just getting soaked when something unusual caught his eyes.

Although it was a bit dark, he thought he saw some kind of huge black dog looking at the students from between two buildings. As its eyes seemed to do a survey of the students, Harry remembered what that looked like. While he was at Flourish and Blotts last, he'd noticed a Grim on the cover of a Divination book, and that's what the dog looked like. Just when he recalled that detail, the dog began looking him in the eye.

“What’s wrong?” Harry jumped slightly from his best friend’s words. “Sorry I scared you,” said Hermione. “You just seemed to be out of it.”

"I-I wasn't scared," defended Harry, "just a bit startled. I just saw a..." He then noticed that the dog wasn't there anymore. "Never mind."

“What?” she asked, now curious.

“Nothing,” he said, “just a dog. It’s not there now.”

“Alright,” she replied. “Brianna’s already joined Professor Grubbly-Plank with most of the other first-years. We need to get going.”

They hurried up to catch up with the group, and got there just in time to see a seventh-year with a Head Boy badge glaring at Draco Malfoy. “Just how stupid do you think I am, Malfoy?!” he yelled. “I heard every word you said to those first-years, and you are in deep trouble. The Headmistress has decided to come down hard on you bigoted idiots!

Everyone who uses that foul word, including yourself and these two goons, is going to have detention with her. She'll let you know when."

It was then that he noticed a few first-year girls nearby that looked scared and hurt, and his opinion of Malfoy dropped even lower. They were obviously muggle-borns just entering a new world, and on their very first day to run across that bigot. He hoped his aunt punished them good. He was pleased to see the new Head Boy start talking kindly to the young students, and knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Percy Weasley would never have tried to comfort those victims of prejudice, that is if he'd even bothered putting a stop to it. Harry knew that Percy simply enjoyed wearing a badge, not actually doing the job he was supposed to do. He remembered that Aunt Minnie had told him that the Head Boy was from Hufflepuff, and that his name was Patrick Furlong. She'd also told him that Penelope Clearwater was Head Girl and Roger Davies was Ravenclaw Quidditch Captain.

He grinned as the little girls ran toward Professor Grubbly-Plank, looking a bit happier. He caught a glimpse of his sister in the group boarding the canoes before getting on a carriage with Hermione, Padma and Ginny, who told them about how Professor Lupin had been sleeping in the compartment she'd ended up in until the Dementors arrived. Eventually, they made it inside the castle.

Harry didn't pay too much attention during most of the sorting, although he did clap politely whenever someone was sorted into Ravenclaw. He was anxious to see where his sister would end up. Finally, Professor Flitwick called out the name, "McGonagall, Brianna."

His sister, still looking wet from the rain, which was still going on if the ceiling of the Great Hall was accurate, walked up to the stool and put on the old hat.

"Where do you think she'll end up?" whispered Hermione as they waited.

"I don't know," said Harry. "She doesn't like learning enough to be a Ravenclaw, and I can't picture her in Hufflepuff. So, either Slytherin or..."

“GRYFFINDOR!” announced the hat, bringing a smile to Brianna’s face as she joined the appropriate table. Harry noticed that she sat down near Ginny.

The rest of the sorting passed quickly, although Harry was noticing an unfortunate pattern. It seemed that every other first-year was named either Harry, James or Lily. Hermione whispered with a smirk, “It seems that a lot of wizarding families named their children after you and your birth-parents.” Harry realized that it was true. These kids were the ones born within ten months of Voldemort’s fall, and many celebrating families undoubtedly wanted to honor the Boy-Who-Lived and his family. One of the boys was named Harry Planter and had dark hair. How much closer could they get than that? Harry noticed his sister smirking at him when that boy’s name was called, and hoped no one else noticed.

However, one person at the staff table did. He had been watching the boy since he’d been introduced. He knew it was possible that his imagination was running wild, but those eyes looked just like Lily Potter’s, and the face looked similar to James’ although this boy didn’t have glasses and his hair was the wrong color, but just as perpetually messy. He’d have to think more about this and see if he could learn more about the boy before jumping to conclusions. The brother and sister could’ve simply had a bet that a lot of kids would be named after the Potter family. He was brought out of his musing by the Headmistress’ speech.

“Welcome to Hogwarts, everyone. I shall make some important announcements immediately after the feast. For now, tuck in.” She waved her hands and the food appeared on all the tables.

The only thing that Aunt Minnie announced after the feast that Harry didn’t know about was that the Potions teacher, Professor LaVelle, would be giving a French class on Saturday afternoons to anyone who was interested in learning the language, regardless of house or year. If enough students joined, she’d split the class up into two sections. He immediately decided to take the class. Hermione said she could already speak a bit of French, but would take the class to improve.

“Professor,” Harry said through gritted teeth. As funny as she was, he was starting to get annoyed. “If it’s better not to warn me, then don’t.”

"But I must do my duty to fate, as *you* must as well, my poor child."

Harry put down his fork and got up, intending to leave the hall before he lost his temper with the old bat.

"I understand the appeal of running away from fate. Seeing is a great burden to bear."

“Good day,” Harry said firmly and started walking toward the exit.

“But if you don’t obey the fates, then you will be punished.” He continued walking. “The Grim will soon cross your path.”

Harry faltered in his steps for a moment at the mention of the Grim, because it reminded him of the dog he saw yesterday. He shook his head and continued walking, not even noticing the Headmistress intervening, nor his friends hurrying after him.

“Sybil, that is quite enough! Even if he weren’t my nephew, I’d still say that student has made it clear he does not wish to take your class, and since Divination isn’t a required subject, I’ll thank you to stop harassing him.”

A few seconds after Harry left the hall, Hermione and Padma caught up with him. “I can’t believe that woman!” said Padma. “Why can’t she just give up?”

"I think she'll stop now," said Hermione. "Did you see Professor McGonagall telling her off?"

Harry stopped and looked at the girls. "What did Aunt Minnie say?"

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Arithmancy was very interesting, and talked about the mathematical principles behind magic. Professor Vector even mentioned that in the

N.E.W.T. classes, they start learning how to create basic spells. Fortunately, the professor didn't assign homework.

Immediately following that, Harry and Hermione met back up with Padma for Defense Against the Dark Arts with Hufflepuff. Padma mentioned that she saw Brianna leaving the room in a hurry to get to Charms class. Both Harry and Hermione had been worried by Professor Lupin's reaction to Harry on the train and wondered if he knew the Potters. Their worries only increased when Lupin was taking attendance and said, "Harry...McGonagall," with a pause between the names like that.

At that moment, Harry wondered if his parents should've changed his first name. He responded, "Here," and the teacher looked in his eyes once again. He wasn't using Legilimency – Harry would've known if he'd tried – but that professor stared at his eyes far too many times for comfort. Harry knew that his eyes looked like his birth-mother's, and for the first time, he regretted getting contact lenses. He should've gotten prescription sunglasses that hid his eyes instead.

The teacher went on with the attendance and then announced, "Put away your books. We'll be having a practical lesson today, and all you'll need are your wands." He then led them to the staff room, where he introduced them to a dark creature.

"Does anybody here know what a Boggart is?" he asked. Every Ravenclaw, along with half the Hufflepuffs, raised their hands. "Miss Granger?"

"It's a shape-shifter," she said. "It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most."

"Couldn't have put it better myself," said Professor Lupin. After a few more minutes of lecturing, he surprised Harry by saying, "Mr. McGonagall, Come up here and help me with the demonstration."

Having no choice, Harry walked up to face the dark creature he'd previously read about and hoped he wouldn't have to face this soon. "Yes, sir."

"What's your greatest fear?"

Not really having any idea what it would be, he said, "Facing a Boggart, sir," much to the amusement of the class. Even Lupin grinned at that.

"Are you saying you don't know what your greatest fear is?" he asked softly.

"Yes, sir."

He looked thoughtful. "Hmm. That does complicate things. What you all will have to do is to think of a way for your greatest fear to be turned into something funny. For example, making a mummy unravel or a banshee getting laryngitis. When you have that picture in your head, you point your wand at the Boggart and say the incantation, '*Riddikulus!*' Good luck, Mr. McGonagall."

Harry stepped up toward the wardrobe where the Boggart had been trapped, and at the same time, Remus used his wand to open it. Harry was not at all prepared for what he saw.

In front of him, lying in the exact position Ginny Weasley had been in months before when Harry entered the Chamber of Secrets, was the dead form of Hermione Granger. She was wearing the same school uniform that the real Hermione was wearing. In fact, the only difference between the two was that the real Hermione was breathing, but this one wasn't. Harry paled as the rest of the class gasped. He heard something hit the floor, and a moment later realized he'd dropped his wand.

Suddenly, someone jumped in front of Harry, and Hermione's body morphed into a sphere of some kind with a loud CRACK. However, before Harry could figure out what kind of sphere, Professor Lupin, who Harry realized was the person who'd jumped in front of him, said the incantation, and the orb turned into a balloon with another loud CRACK and blew around the room as it lost air.

It stopped in front of Padma and morphed into a huge snake. The girl paled for a moment before saying, "*Riddikulus!*" and changing it into a large jack-in-the-box. The Boggart ended up in front of almost everybody in the whole class before time ran out. Hermione was the only person from Ravenclaw who didn't face it.

After class, Lupin asked Harry, Hermione and Padma to stay for a minute and informed them that he'd continue the Patronus lessons Professor McGonagall had begun on Saturday morning and dismissed them after they promised to be there.

"I wish I'd gotten the chance to face the Boggart," Hermione complained on the way out of class.

"I wish I hadn't," Harry muttered, but both his companions heard him. Hermione blushed and remained silent, looking at the floor, just like Harry.

Padma interjected, “You just weren’t ready for it, Harry. That’s all. You’ve actually seen life or death situations, so your Boggart reflected that you’d be afraid of one of your friends dying.”

"I guess so," said Harry, looking up to face her.

“The Boggart just picked the girl you care about most,” she said deadpan, causing Harry’s face to turn bright red.

"I, I've got to go. I'll...see you at lunch," Harry said before bolting.

“Padma!” yelled Hermione.

“What?” she asked with a smirk. “I’m just telling the truth and you know it.”

"Maybe," Hermione replied, smiling, "but all you accomplished was to drive him away."

“He’ll be back once his face can’t light up the whole castle anymore,” she said defensively.

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Padma was correct that Harry did show up a few minutes after lunch started, and decided to pretend that the whole 'Boggart' situation had never happened. He was rather successful until a certain first-year Gryffindor girl with brown hair and blue eyes walked up to them.

“Hi, Harry.”

“Hey, Brianna,” he said with a grin. “Congratulations on not making Slytherin. I can’t say how surprised I am.”

“Ha-ha,” she replied.

“I’m sure you like all those red decorations in that common room.”

“Yes, I do,” she replied. “Did Padma mention I had Defense first class?” Harry and Hermione nodded. “I would’ve waited for you guys but didn’t want to be late for Charms. Professor Lupin said he was going to tell you that we’re having the Patronus lesson Saturday. Did he?”

“Yes,” said Hermione.

“He also said he was going to show you guys a Boggart.”

“Um, yeah,” said Harry, looking at the floor, causing Brianna to ask Padma,

“What happened?”

Following the embarrassing account of Harry’s Boggart, along with a lot of teasing from his little sister, Harry announced he was done eating and going to Care of Magical Creatures class early. Hermione and Padma followed.

Professor Grubbly-Plank’s lesson was on an Augurey she’d brought for class. It basically looked like small, underfed, greenish-black vulture and sings what sounds like a frightening wail when it’s going to rain. They are rated by the Ministry as harmless, thus Grubbly-Plank felt comfortable showing one to her class of third-years. Malfoy was in this class, but didn’t start any trouble.

Padma was taking this course, as well as Ancient Runes, which they had next. She informed them that according to Parvati, Professor Trelawney had told her class that Harry had ‘the gift’ but hadn’t signed up for Divination. Thus, due to this grave error, he had trouble in his future, perhaps even the Grim.

Ancient Runes was a difficult subject for Harry, even though he had read the book. He understood the concepts, but had trouble memorizing all the different symbols. Hermione promised to help him learn them.

After dinner, Harry found that Roger Davies had posted a notice in the common room that everyone that wanted to play Quidditch was required to tryout, even if they'd been on the team the previous year, and that tryouts would be Sunday Morning. After spending a few hours doing homework, he bid Hermione and Padma a good night and went to bed.

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

If you wish to read the poem, *That Poor Snitch*, which I credited to Brianna, it is located within the reviews of the previous chapter, and was actually written by the author JustWriter2 ([http : / / www. fanfiction. net/ u/ 892327/ JustWriter2](http://www.fanfiction.net/u/892327/JustWriter2)), who also posted it at [http : / / www. fanfiction. net/ s/ 4223835/ 1/ ThatPoorSnitch](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/4223835/1/ThatPoorSnitch). I find it quite amusing, and I'm sure she would appreciate a review of that poem if you enjoy it as well.

By the way, several reviewers have informed me that there were longer Quidditch games than the one described in the previous chapter. Since I can't even imagine watching a 5 day game, let alone one that lasts longer, in this story that was the longest game ever.

By the way, in PoA, Professor Lupin claimed nobody knows what a Boggart looks like when it's alone, yet in OotP, Mad-Eye Moody used his magical eye to determine that a Boggart was at Grimmauld Place from a different room. Apparently, he knows what they look like.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 25 – Friends of the Family

“Excellent. I see you’re all on time,” said Remus Lupin as he opened the door to his classroom. Harry, Hermione, Padma and Brianna walked in. It was Saturday morning, the day of their first Patronus lesson with Professor Lupin.

“To begin with, let’s see how well you’re doing so far. Harry, you first.”

While he stepped forward and summoned his wand out of his holster, Remus was once again struck by how much this blond boy with an American accent otherwise reminded him of his old friends. His face was almost identical to James' at that age, except for his eyes, which looked exactly like Lily's. He was brought back to the present by the spell being cast.

“Expecto Patronum!” shouted Harry, causing a round shield of light to come from his wand.

“Good job, Harry. I’m sure that helped hold back the Dementor on the train.”

“For a few seconds,” he replied, slightly blushing, “but then it was able to push it to the side like my Patronus was nothing.”

After the other three had demonstrated the spell, Brianna complained, “I couldn’t even get that small shield up at all when that monster was in our compartment,” sounding ashamed.

Remus nodded. “It is much more difficult to cast the spell when a Dementor is near, and you’re all going to have to work very hard to master this spell. It’s actually a N.E.W.T. level charm, so it’s amazing that you’ve already had any success with it, especially you, Brianna. You should be proud of what you’ve accomplished. Now, let’s see if we can’t improve all your Patronuses before this lesson is over...”

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After lunch, the four students went to Professor LaVelle's French class, which had twenty-nine students of all grades and houses.

Since it was that small, she decided to keep them all in one class – every Saturday afternoon. Hermione knew everything covered in the first lesson, but still wanted to continue in the class.

The next morning was the Ravenclaw Quidditch tryouts, with Roger Davies, the new captain, having everybody earn their positions, even if they'd had them the previous year. Harry found that they went very much the way they had under Michelle the previous year, starting off with everyone flying around the pitch to eliminate a few hopefuls who couldn't fly a broom to save their lives.

Roger obviously kept his starting position, and Sean Bradley, a 4th year who'd been on the team since his 2nd year, was clearly the best Chaser candidate and would naturally keep his starting position. That left one open spot on the starting team, and the competition was fierce. Hermione, on her Nimbus 2001, gave her best, and from the stands Harry could easily see she'd improved a lot over the past year, even if she wasn't as good as Davies and Bradley. When Chaser tryouts were over, he honestly couldn't predict who would win the coveted position on the starting team, but told Hermione she'd done a great job.

When it finally was time for the Seekers to try out, Cho Chang was, yet again, Harry's only competition. She had improved over the previous year, but Harry managed to beat her to the Snitch, yet again. Since it was only the two of them, it was obvious that Harry would be a starter while Cho would be a reserve.

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As soon as the tryout was over, Harry and Hermione went to lunch, sitting with Padma, who had spent the morning doing 'Muggle Studies' homework.

“How’d it go?”

“Harry was fantastic!” said Hermione enthusiastically, causing Harry’s ears to turn pink.

“I was okay,” he said. “I managed to beat Cho, anyway, and she was my only competition. Hermione flew the best I’ve ever seen her. I think she has a good chance of making the starting team this year.”

“There were others better than me,” replied Hermione with a slight frown.

"I think you underestimate yourself," he replied before shrugging his shoulders. "Anyway, we should know tonight what Roger decides."

"You're right," said Hermione. "There's no point in worrying about it."

“Besides,” interjected Padma, who’d enjoyed listening to them discuss the tryouts, “we’ve got something else to look forward to today – our *special* lesson.”

Both Harry and Hermione grinned. He said, "At 1:30..."

"In Professor McGonagall's office," completed Hermione.

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After lunch, the C.A.R.E. group met together at headquarters to study together until the trio left to meet with Headmistress McGonagall for extra help in Transfiguration. It's not that they didn't trust anyone in their group, but the Animagus lessons were supposed to be a complete secret. They walked up to the gargoyle guarding the entrance.

Harry looked distinctly uncomfortable as he faced the statue. "I can't believe Aunt Minnie went and..." he grumbled before Hermione interrupted him with a smirk.

“Green-Eyed Seeker,” she proclaimed, convincing the gargoyle to move, allowing them access to the stairs. Harry’s ears turned pink.

"It could be worse," Padma said. "She could have made it, '*I luv my 'tittle neph-y-poo.*'" Harry glared at her without comment as they walked. Hermione was laughing as she knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

“Hello, Professor,” said Hermione as she opened the door. “I must say I like your new password.”

A small smile crossed the older woman’s lips. “It’s easy for me to remember and I doubt many people would guess it.”

“Plus, it has the extra benefit of irritating me,” added Harry dryly.

“There is that,” she replied nonchalantly before chuckling for a moment. The girls giggled madly as Harry’s face turned red. “Before we embarrass my nephew any further, I thought I’d let you know the punishment that I’m assigning to everyone who uses the vile m-word or shows blood-prejudice in another way.”

“You mean what Malfoy and his goons are going to be doing?” said Harry.

“Yes, they are the first recipients of this punishment.”

“So, what is it?” asked Padma.

“I’ve given them each a copy of the school O.W.L. records for the past hundred years. They are public records. Their jobs are for each of them to tally up the number of O.W.L.s that went to pureblood, half-blood and muggle-born students and mathematically determine their distribution – which group got more per person – and then write up a report about their findings.”

Hermione’s eyebrows came together as she thought about this for a few moments before asking, “What will their findings be?”

“That the purebloods have been doing more poorly with each generation,” Minerva sadly replied. “Oh, certain individual purebloods have done well, but on the whole their magical ability and intelligence have been declining.”

“Due to inbreeding?” suggested Hermione cautiously.

“Most likely,” nodded Minerva. “Many families are so concerned about making sure their blood remains *pure* that they’ll marry their own cousins. Misters Crabbe and Goyle are products of that.” She took a deep breath, shaking her head. “So far, the Malfoy family hasn’t gone beyond fourth cousins, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it does in the next generation or two.”

“I can just imagine Malfoy’s conclusion,” said Harry.

“The muggle-borns are cheating,” finished Hermione.

“If he remembers to use the right term,” commented Padma.

“Now that I’ve told you about that,” said Minerva, “I believe we should get started. We all know why we’re here.”

“To become party animals,” said Padma with a grin.

“To become *Animagi*,” corrected Minerva, now entering what they knew as lecture mode. Padma’s expression returned to normal. “This is a long and difficult process, which takes nearly two years on average. You’ve all read and understood the book I gave you, so one of you should be able to tell me the first step in the process, which you will begin now.”

Hermione’s hand immediately shot up in the air. “Hermione,” said the Headmistress. “Since this is not a formal class, I don’t believe that it is necessary to observe that particular protocol of raising your hand to speak.”

Her ears turned pink, but she spoke anyway. “Sorry, Professor. The first step is to clear your mind in order to get tuned-in to your instincts.”

“Correct. I would reward points for that answer, but we want this training to be off the record.”

“Isn’t that first part similar to preparing to learn occlumency?” asked Harry.

“Yes, to a point. However, that is where the similarities end. In order to become an Animagus, you must delve deep within yourself to learn your very primal nature. It will probably take several weeks before you’re able to tap into that form, and even then, you won’t know what it is until you successfully transform, but I have high hopes that you’ll all be able to begin attempting to transform a finger by Christmas.”

“A finger?” repeated Harry with a dismayed expression on his face.

“Yes, Harry,” she answered a bit harshly. “I told you this will take about two years of hard work. If you haven’t the patience for it, now’s the time to say so.”

"I'm sorry," he said, properly humbled.

“Very well. To begin...”

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Two hours later, a very mentally exhausted trio made their way into Ravenclaw Tower. Harry had honestly believed that the Animagus exercises would be easy, but he was proven wrong. It did give him an even higher respect for his Aunt Minnie for going through all of that work to become a tabby cat. However, he had made up his mind to become a 'party animal' and was determined to see it through. Besides, he knew there was a prophecy involving him and Voldemort, even though he didn't know the exact contents. If it did turn out to mean he had to fight Voldemort, he wanted to have every possible weapon he could, including the ability to turn into an animal, during that fight.

“Oh, look,” commented Padma. “They’ve already got the Quidditch roster posted.”

Hermione tensed up immediately. “R-really?” she asked.

Deciding not to comment on his best friend's nervousness, he put a hand on her shoulder and gently pushed her forward. "Come on. Let's see who Roger picked." As soon as they were close enough, Harry scanned the list with his eyes.

Ravenclaw Quidditch Line-Up

Chaser/Cpt.Roger Davies – 5th year

Chaser Sean Bradley – 4th year

Chaser Hermione Granger – 3rd year

“Yes!!” shouted Hermione before Harry got past her name, calling a lot of attention to them. When she noticed, her face turned red and she looked down, but the smile never faded.

'*She looks so cute when she's embarrassed,*' he thought for a moment before stopping that train of thought. '*She's not cute! She's your best friend!*' he forcefully reminded himself. He grinned at her and said, "Congratulations, Hermione. I knew you'd make it." He glanced back at the list just to make sure he was the starting Seeker, remembering what happens to people who assume. He smiled when he read his name.

Seeker Harry McGonagall – 3rd year

Hermione suddenly frowned. “Now, people are going to expect me to be as good as Roger and Sean. I’m going to have to put in more time to practice, but I’ve got to keep up my studying and...”

“Hermione, relax. All people will expect is for you to do your best.” Harry smirked when he added, “If anyone criticizes you, I’ll…”

“Do nothing,” interrupted Hermione, crossing her arms. “Remember to control your temper.”

“Good job, Hermione,” interrupted Padma with a grin.

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The next two weeks went by quickly, with Patronus lessons every Saturday and Quidditch and Animagus practices every Sunday. Harry was getting a bit nervous about Lupin recognizing him for who he really was, especially after he got his aunt to admit that he had known

the Potters well. The DADA teacher had subtly asked different questions about his family, and learned that Harry's family had moved to America about two months after Voldemort was vanquished. Not knowing what else to do, Harry just did his best not to call more attention to himself, hoping that Lupin wouldn't put the clues together.

Harry, Hermione and Padma were sitting at the Ravenclaw table on Thursday, September 16th, eating dinner when a first-year Gryffindor girl interrupted them.

"Hey, guess what?"

"What, Brianna?" replied Harry with a grin. He had a feeling that he already knew what had happened.

"We had our first flying lesson."

"I know," Harry replied with a smile. "I'll bet you did a lot better than the other kids since you've been flying for years."

"Exactly! Madam Hooch said I was one of the best first-years she's seen!"

"That's good, Brianna," said Hermione.

"Just remember," Harry said, with his voice lowered, "Don't get caught with your Silver Bullet, but if you do, I had nothing to do with you getting it here."

"There you are, Brianna," said another little girl in a Gryffindor uniform. She had red hair and brown eyes.

"I was just telling my brother about our flying lesson, Lily."

"That's your brother, Harry?" the girl asked.

"Yes. Harry, this is one of my dorm mates – Lily Spindler."

"It's good to meet you," said Harry with a grin. "I'm sorry about your misfortune of sharing a room with my sister," he said sympathetically. "I know she can be a real...OUCH...pain." Brianna had kicked his

shin while he was talking. "See what I mean?" The girl giggled and Harry continued. "These are Hermione Granger and Padma Patil." The two girls waved at Lily.

"Did you tell him how you flew that Slytherin boy into the ground?"

"What happened?" asked Harry, now slightly concerned as his eyes scanned Brianna for any injuries.

"Nothing, just some pureblood brat who doesn't think the children of squibs should be allowed at Hogwarts, or to fly brooms. I challenged him to a little competition toward the end, when Hooch let us do a bit of free-flying and ran him into the ground."

"Did you get in trouble?" asked Hermione.

"No, I didn't make him follow me. He simply crashed because he couldn't keep up, so we all got to see a bit of his pureblood flowing gracefully from his nose into the mud, becoming *mudblood*."

"What's his name?" asked Harry intently.

"It doesn't matter," said Brianna, looking intently into her brother's eyes as if to say, "*Stay out of it*." "If he starts any trouble, I'll handle it."

"Fine," said Harry, giving in for the moment.

Lily looked between the two of them and faced Harry. "You'd beat the tar out of that boy right now if Brianna said the word, wouldn't you?"

Despite the disapproving looks he was getting from both Brianna and Hermione, he answered honestly. "Yes, I would."

Lily beamed at him. "That is so sweet! A boy ready to stick up for his little sister. Brianna doesn't know how lucky she is to have you. I wish I my brother was like you. He's a second-year Hufflepuff named George, by the way, but he won't even publicly talk to me here – afraid it'll ruin his reputation. But he..."

"We'd better get to our table, Lily," interrupted Brianna, exchanging a look with her brother as they left.

"That girl Lily sure can talk," said Harry.

"I think she fancies you," commented Padma, earning a glare from both her companions. "That's why she was just chattering away."

“Did you notice her name and hair color?” asked Hermione.

“Naturally,” said Harry, rolling his eyes.

"I wonder if she'd have been named Harriet if she'd been born with black hair instead of red," commented Padma.

Harry completely ignored his friend, picking up his fork and jabbing it into a piece of roast beef.

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It was only three days later, on a Sunday evening, that for the third year in a row Harry threw a small birthday party for Hermione. Like the previous year, it was at C.A.R.E. headquarters, and all their friends attended. Harry gave Hermione a broomstick servicing kit for her Nimbus 2001, as well as a new pair of Chaser gloves. She and Harry were the last to leave Hagrid's old cabin, and just before Hermione walked out, she said, "Thank you, Harry," and kissed him on the cheek.

He stood there in shock for a few minutes, watching her walk away, absent-mindedly touching the spot on his cheek where she'd placed her lips. "You're welcome," he finally whispered when she was completely out of earshot.

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The next time they saw each other, both Harry and Hermione pretended nothing had happened and acted the same as always. The

next week, the trio was on their way to Charms class, when they saw Brianna hurriedly walking the opposite direction.

"She must be running late," he commented.

"Look at that," commented Padma, who pointed her finger at a first-year boy in Slytherin robes pointing his wand behind Brianna.

"New Sparks!" whispered Harry, summoning his wand.

Unfortunately, the first-year cast a tripping hex at Brianna before Harry could interfere. It hit her in the leg and she fell forward. She was slowly getting her wand in her hand as Harry's face turned red. He took a deliberate step before a hand reached around him from behind, grabbing his chest.

"Let her handle this," whispered Hermione, who was holding Harry back.

The boy was laughing as he yelled, "You're just as bad as a mudblood, you..."

Faster than lightning, Brianna turned around and aimed her wand. "*Bates Mocus!*"

The greenish-yellow spell shot from Brianna's wand straight to the Slytherin's nose. He suddenly had an expression of terror on his face as he began to claw at his nose, which disgusting little yellow bats were now exiting while flapping their wings.

"Eww!" said Hermione.

"Gross," agreed Padma. "I wonder where she learned that."

"If I'm not mistaken," said Hermione, "that's the bat-bogey hex that Ginny Weasley enjoys casting."

"I've seen them together a few times," said Harry, enjoying watching the Slytherin trying to fight off the bats that were now attacking his face. "She must have taught it to Brianna."

“What’s going on here?” came the squeaky voice of Professor Flitwick.

“That Slytherin attacked my sister from behind,” answered Harry, “so she hexed him back. Do you have time to watch it in a Pensieve?”

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After watching the memory, the Slytherin, whose name was Malachi Macnair, was sent to the headmistress for punishment. Brianna was very proud of herself for the way she'd handled the situation, and Harry was glad he hadn't interfered. Otherwise, he would've been the recipient of the bat-bogey hex.

The rest of the week passed quickly, and before long, it was Saturday morning, and the Patronus lesson was just about over. Harry had kept his shield up for nearly a minute.

“Good job, Harry,” said Lupin.

“Thanks.”

Remus looked around the room at the others. "You all did well. The lesson's over, but I would like to speak with Harry privately."

“Er, fine,” said Harry, not seeing much of a choice. He exchanged a look of concern with Hermione, Padma and Brianna, but none of them said anything. “Um, bye guys.”

“Bye, Harry,” said Hermione while touching his hand briefly.

"See you," said Padma.

“See ya, later,” said Brianna. “I’ve got to catch up with Lily.”

Once the three girls were outside the room, Professor Lupin closed the door and turned around. Seeing Harry still standing, he said, "Have a seat, Mr. Potter."

Harry's eyes bulged out. "P-P-Potter? My name's McGonagall. You know that."

"I know that," he replied calmly, "but I also know that you have James Potter's face and untamable hair, even if it's not the same color. You also have Lily Evans' eyes. Your name is Harry and you're the right age. Dumbledore said you had a scar, but those things can be hidden." He looked Harry straight in the eyes from a foot away for about thirty seconds. "You are Harry Potter. Admit it."

The Boy-Who-Lived swallowed as he backed into a chair and sat without saying anything.

"So what happened? Did Dumbledore ask Professor McGonagall to find you a home? It would be a clever ruse to claim you'd disappeared. None of the Death Eaters can harm you if they don't know where you are."

"No," said Harry, finally speaking. "Aunt Minnie didn't tell Dumbledore."

"Really?" Remus asked, looking genuinely surprised.

"He knows now." Harry paused before adding, "Are you going to expose me?"

Remus sat down facing his student. "Your parents were the best friends I ever had. I'd never betray their son...or them." Remus' expression hardened at the end of that sentence, and Harry believed he knew why.

"My aunt told me all about Sirius Black and...what he did."

Taking a deep breath, Lupin said, "Yes, well, I *won't* be like him. I would like to know the whole story, though. Why did Minerva take you from your relatives? Who else knows? How did Dumbledore find out?"

"Professor," said Harry with one hand up, as though to say *slow down*, "let's take this one question at a time. Did Lily Potter ever tell you about her sister?"

“Well, yes. She said they didn’t get along very well, that she was terribly jealous of her magic. If memory serves, she married a thoroughly despicable fellow – Vernon Doosley.”

“It’s Dursley, but the rest is right. Aunt Minnie watched that family for the whole day, and came to the conclusion that they were the worst sort of muggles imaginable. I met them a few years ago and agree. Anyway, when Dumbledore tried to leave me with them, Aunt Minnie warned him not to, but he wouldn’t listen. So, once he’d apparated away, leaving me on the doorstep with a note, she took me and got my parents – her nephew Mark and his wife Cindy – to adopt me. They claimed they found me on *their* doorstep.”

For the next few hours, Harry explained the rest of his story to Professor Lupin, who then started telling him about James and Lily, going so far as to show Harry a picture of them with him in the middle. It was taken the day Harry was born. It was really the first time he’d really talked about his parents. Aunt Minnie had told him a bit about them, but she found the topic rather painful, so she didn’t bring them up often. Besides, as Remus pointed out, she didn’t know half of what James got up to while he was in school. When Remus mentioned the Invisibility cloak, Harry decided not to mention that he had it, since the man talking to him was a teacher. Remus was under the impression that the cloak was lost or destroyed when Voldemort attacked the Potters, and Harry decided to keep it that way.

The conversation finally ended when there was a knock at the door. “Come in,” said Lupin, and in stepped Hermione. She looked a bit nervous.

“I’m sorry to interrupt. I just wanted to make sure that...that Harry was still here. He missed lunch and...”

“I’m sorry,” said Lupin. “I completely lost track of the time. Why don’t I show you to the kitchens?”

“We know the way,” said Harry without thinking.

Remus looked at him for a moment before laughing. “Just like your father.”

Harry spent his whole day in Hogsmeade with Neville, checking out the different shops and pretending to be happy. Every time he saw Padma and Hermione, he turned around, telling himself that he can spend one day without Hermione. They even ate lunch at opposite sides of the Three Broomsticks. The only trouble was that he'd keep imagining how she would react to the different places they visited. He knew she wouldn't be too excited about Honeydukes, because she doesn't eat many sweets. She'd love the book shop. He knew she'd recite the legend of the Shrieking Shack, with whatever facts there were about the place, naming each witness who'd admitted to hearing screams coming from the small cabin. While he was picking up Brianna's order, Harry did buy a special quill for Hermione that he thought she'd like, but told Neville that it was for himself.

Hermione kept a smile plastered on her face the whole day as she walked with Padma, but it was really difficult when she'd see Harry turn his back on her. "Don't worry, Hermione," Padma would say. "He's just being stubborn. He misses you even more than you miss him. He just won't admit it."

"I'm not so sure," Hermione replied the first time Padma said that. "Why should he enjoy hanging out with me? I've kept him busy reading most of the time..."

"When you're not at Quidditch practice with him," the Hindu girl replied. "I'd have never guessed you'd join a team when I first met you." She sighed. "My point is that you're not boring, and Harry knows you're not boring." She grinned. "He's crazy about you and just doesn't want to admit it."

Hermione blushed for a moment before a worried expression crossed her face. "But if he is...then why shouldn't he admit it? Is he ashamed to fancy me?"

"He just doesn't want to prove Brianna right. That's all. Eventually, he'll realize that he's making himself a lot more miserable than he's making Brianna."

With a sigh, Hermione replied, "I hope so."

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After dropping off Brianna's purchases, Harry did join Hermione and Padma at the Halloween feast, sitting next to Hermione as usual. "Hi, girls," he said. "How'd you enjoy your day?"

"It was fun," said Hermione with a fake grin.

“Listen, I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings earlier today, Hermione,” he said softly. He glanced around to see his sister at the Gryffindor table with her back to him. “I did miss you, and I got you a little something.” He pulled out the Ravenclaw blue quill he’d purchased for her. “It’s not much, but…”

"I love it," she said with a grin. "Thank you."

The rest of the feast went by pleasantly after that, and when it was over, they were dismissed to the Ravenclaw common room. They were studying together at a table when Professor Flitwick entered the room with an uncharacteristically grim expression.

"I'm afraid everyone has to spend the night in the Great Hall. Sirius Black has been sighted inside the castle."

Shouts of, “What?” and, “Where?” came from all over the room.

“For reasons not yet determined, he was trying to make his way into Gryffindor Tower and slashed the portrait that guards the entrance with a knife.”

-HP-

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 26 – Beginnings

After Professor Flitwick had finished telling the Ravenclaw students about Sirius Black's attempted break-in to Gryffindor Tower, Harry, along with all his housemates, hurriedly prepared for bed in silence so that five minutes later the large group of children in bedclothes were following their head of house to the Great Hall. The whole time, Harry was thinking only one thing – *'Black knows I'm here, but like last time, he doesn't want to just kill me. He wants to kill Brianna first.'*

"I know what you're thinking..." a familiar whisper pulled him out of his musings. He turned to see his best friend, Hermione Granger, looking pointedly at him. She continued quietly, "...but you're wrong. Black wasn't after Brianna. It's just a coincidence."

"But," he began to protest before being cut off.

Hermione whispered firmly, with Padma between them and any potential eavesdroppers, "The Potters were all in Gryffindor and so was Sirius Black. If he is after Harry Potter, that's where he'd look for him." She paused. "It does seem strange that he doesn't know the Boy-Who-Lived never showed up here, though." She shrugged. "But that's the only possible explanation of why he came here. She's the wrong gender and wrong year."

"So you're saying Brianna's probably safe. He'll just kill Neville instead, thinking he's the Boy-Who-Lived."

Hermione nodded with a concerned expression. "Or possibly Seamus Finnegan. I don't think he'd mistake Ron Weasley for Harry Potter, and certainly not Dean Thomas."

"What about the twelve innocent people he killed beside Pettigrew?" countered Harry, starting to raise his voice until Hermione alerted him to that fact. He quietly continued, "He doesn't have any problem killing bystanders, so Brianna is still in danger."

"No more danger than any other Gryffindor," she replied. She then added, "We're here."

She was correct; they had arrived in the Great Hall, which was currently filled with sleeping bags. The Gryffindors were already settled in for the night while the other houses were arriving. Harry scanned the group of 'lions' with his eyes until he found the one he was looking for amongst the first-year girls. He made a beeline straight for his sister, with Hermione and Padma staying behind with the other Ravenclaws, figuring they should be alone.

When Harry approached Brianna, he saw that she was unusually pale as she lay in her pink sleeping bag, with just her head sticking out. She was in between two other girls – one of whom was her friend, Lily. They were all wide-awake, and Lily blushed slightly when he walked up to them.

"Hi, Brianna," he said and nodded to the other girls. "I wanted to make sure you're alright."

"I'm fine," she replied quickly. "You didn't need to bother."

"There's no reason to be rude," chided Lily. "I wish my brother cared enough to check on me."

"Fine," she said with a sigh and turned to Harry. "I'm sorry. Thank you for your concern."

Harry knew his sister too well to be convinced by her brave face. She was scared and upset. The worst part was probably that she didn't have anybody who knew why she'd take this visit by Sirius Black personally, so she had to act like she didn't. However, he didn't think that telling her so would help this conversation any. So, he decided to be polite and say, "That's alright. I'm glad you're fine. You know where to find me if you need anything." He squeezed her shoulder reassuringly for a moment before saying, "Goodnight," and walking away.

After he found his Ravenclaw friends and briefly told them what happened, he claimed a blue sleeping bag and tried to sleep.

--HP--

Over the next few days, the assault on Gryffindor's portrait by the notorious Sirius Black seemed to be the only thing anybody could talk about. Lupin seemed especially distressed to Harry. In fact, he seemed quite ill when they had him in class on Thursday and was too sick to teach the next day, according to Cho Chang, who had DADA on Fridays. He was still too ill for their Patronus lesson the next day. Harry wondered if he'd gotten himself sick worrying about Sirius or if he just was chronically ill, since he'd also been sick the previous month.

Harry was surprised the next day to see that Lupin hadn't been well enough to watch the first Quidditch match of the year, considering the stories he'd been told about James Potter – Harry's *other* dad – being on the Gryffindor team. Of course, the weather – storming terribly – might have contributed to that decision. Harry, Hermione and Padma were in the stands with their fellow Ravenclaws, waiting for Lee Jordan to start his justifiably biased commentary on this match.

"Welcome, everyone, to the first Quidditch match of the year!" his voice, aided by magic, boomed out to the crowd. Harry joined in the cheering. "Today's match is *GRYFFINDOR!*" He paused to allow applause. "Versus Slytherin. Here come the Gryffindor lions. Captain and Keeper – Oliver Wood!"

He kept introducing the teammates, all the way to Ginny Weasley, who had kept her position as Seeker. Harry grinned as he glanced over to the Gryffindor section and saw Brianna loudly applauding her. It seemed to him that Ginny had taken his sister under her wing, and for that he was grateful. It was good to know someone in Gryffindor tower was looking out for her.

Harry looked back up at the players and saw that he'd missed jeering the snakes. The two captains who clearly hated each other performed the stupid tradition of trying to break each other's hands, more commonly known as shaking hands, and Madam Hooch released the balls. Harry was once more glad he'd gotten contact lenses. He wouldn't have been able to see anything through his glasses in this heavy rain.

What Harry did see was not Quidditch at its best. To go along with the freezing rain was powerful wind. Together, those factors affected everyone's ability to fly. Harry could see that the chasers were having difficulty flying straight, as well as passing the Quaffle, but both teams were bravely pressing on and occasionally making goals, causing the fans to cheer. When he'd glance at the Seekers, he noticed that they were mostly staying in the same spot desperately looking for the Snitch. He also observed that Ginny in particular was shivering from the cold.

About forty-five minutes into the game, Harry was watching Angelina Johnson put the Quaffle through the right Gryffindor goal when Lee announced, "It looks like Ginny Weasley has spotted the Snitch! She is flying upwards, followed closely by Terrence Higgs. I think I can see it! She's getting closer, closer. Come on, Ginny! She's reaching out her...oh no! What are they doing here?!"

Harry didn't have to ask what Jordan was talking about as he felt a chill much worse than anything the weather could produce run through his body. As he began to hear a faint cry of a desperate woman pleading for her baby's life in his mind, he glanced up to see a swarm of Dementors. "New Sparks!" he said, summoning his wand out of his holster while he used his Occlumency to force his memories back. He knew it wouldn't help if the attackers got closer to him, but for now, it was sufficient enough so that he could concentrate.

"OH NO! She's falling!" shouted Lee Jordan the moment Harry noticed the streak of red slip off her broom and plummet toward the ground. He got up from his seat, pointing his wand and wondering what to do. He tried to move forward to get close enough to help his friend, but the crowd was now in a state of panic as everyone was trying to run away from the Dementors. He desperately looked around for a way through the crowd and noticed Hermione next to him, doing the same.

Harry sighed with relief when he spotted his aunt, Headmistress McGonagall, perform the familiar swish and flick necessary to catch Ginny with a levitation charm just in time. His friend was floating unconscious a few feet above the ground when Madam Pomfrey ran

toward her. In the meantime, Professor Flitwick cast his Patronus, which appeared to be a large mouse, toward the invading Dementors.

Once Ginny was safely on a stretcher, Minerva was able to add her silver tabby cat to the fight. For one ridiculous moment, Harry wondered if the two Patronuses would fight each other instead of the Dementors, but both of them attacked the monsters that the Ministry claimed they could control, and were soon joined by others, presumably from other staff members, and the invaders finally began to flee. Harry wished he were far enough along in his training to have a corporeal animal to send at the evil beasts, but he knew the best he could do is shield himself and those close to him, and he was staying alert, prepared to do just that. A quick glance at his companions told him they were ready as well, although for some reason Hermione, who was still next to him, was holding her wand in her left hand.

He was relieved when the effects of the Dementors left him as they fled the group of Patronuses, and finally noticed that Ginny was now awake, but still on the pitch, with Madam Pomfrey looking her over. He saw her open her right hand, which had been closed in a tight fist, to see a tiny golden ball with wings begin to flutter. Ginny, although looking pale, grinned as she re-caught the tiny object.

Lee Jordan, who'd stayed at his post, announced to the small crowd that hadn't left the pitch, "I don't believe it. Ginny Weasley managed to grab the Snitch before she fell. Gryffindor wins: 230 – 60!" It was only when he'd started to clap his hands that Harry realized that at some point he had grabbed Hermione's right hand with his left.

--HP--

The next few weeks went by quickly. Ginny Weasley, who had fully recovered, having merely fainted from the Dementors right after grabbing the Snitch, was enjoying being the heroine of Gryffindor Quidditch. Unfortunately, her broom had been destroyed by the Whomping Willow after she'd fallen, but at Brianna's suggestion, C.A.R.E. raised enough money from the members to surprise her at the next meeting.

"Attention, everyone," said Harry once the group had discussed how many new memberships they'd gotten and any new ideas they had

for recruiting or promoting house elf rights. Besides getting new people, not much had happened with C.A.R.E. since they had that law passed and the Malfoys were convicted of abusing their elves, therefore having them confiscated. A few other rich families had also lost elves due to the law, but C.A.R.E. wasn't directly involved with the cases. They also were no closer to finding the book that explained the house elf enslavement contract than they were two years before. They knew many places it wasn't located, but not where it was.

Harry continued with a small grin, "As most of you are aware, one of our members suffered the loss of her broom, due entirely to the extreme stupidity of the Ministry in assigning Dementors to terrorize, I mean *guard*, Hogwarts." He saw Ginny's face turning red before she began closely examining her shoes. He knew the Weasleys would never be able to afford a new broomstick for her, since they'd squandered all their winnings from the previous summer on a vacation, but made it a point not to mention that. "We'd like to honor Ginevra Weasley for her extreme Gryffindor courage and determination, in catching the Snitch despite those foul creatures. You are a credit to your house." If possible, what he could see of Ginny's face got even redder. Harry turned to his sister. "Brianna, if you will?" Harry sat down.

The girl, with a large smile on her face, pulled a long package from under the table she had been sitting at as she got up and carried it to the spot where her brother had been seated. "Ginny, come up here." The redhead slowly rose from her table and walked across Hagrid's old hut as Brianna continued. "Ginny, you've been like a big sister to me these past few months and we were all very sorry about your broom, so, um, I thought it would be good if we..." she indicated everyone in the room, "pulled our resources and replaced it."

Harry could see that Ginny was near tears when his sister presented her with the package, which she proceeded to tear open with abandon, revealing a brand new Nimbus 2001, and he knew they'd done the right thing. Hermione had quickly squeezed his hand and let go while they were watching the presentation.

Brianna continued, "For Gryffindors like me, you've been a great inspiration, displaying the courage that our house is known for." She then added with a smirk, "Not only are you displaying our colors in your hair, but your face is Gryffindor red as well." This brought chuckles all around the room before Brianna continued. "You're an inspiration to all of us, regardless of house, and we hope you'll fly this broom in good health...and grab the Snitch right from under my brother's nose when you play him this February." This brought more laughter as Harry got up.

"I think your speech is done, Brianna," he said with a smirk, and then turned to the crowd. "Let's hear it for Ginny Weasley, the second-best Seeker at Hogwarts."

"Hey!" protested Ginny as the crowd cheered.

--HP--

Aunt Minnie had argued and argued with Fudge, but the Dementors were still nearby. The Minister's assurance that the monsters wouldn't cross Hogwarts' boundaries again didn't make her feel any better about it.

The attack did, however, inspire her to announce the next day that the school would be giving weekly Patronus lessons to all interested students. Harry was told that his group would simply continue practicing at those sessions in the Great Hall at the same times they were already doing so. Professor Lupin would give the lessons unless he was too sick to teach, and in that case, either Flitwick or Minerva would handle the lesson. Aunt Minnie admitted to Harry that Lupin had a chronic illness that, although not life threatening, did sometimes interfere with his ability to teach.

The next Quidditch match, which was Ravenclaw versus Hufflepuff, came up very quickly. Both teams had new captains – Roger Davies and Cedric Diggory respectively – and this would be both their debuts. It would be the last match before winter break and Harry was grateful that this game had much better weather than the previous one. It was cold, but it wasn't raining (or snowing). Aunt Minnie had assured her nephew that she had taken precautions against the Dementors.

--HP--

"Welcome, everyone, to the second Quidditch match of the year!" announced Lee Jordan. "Hufflepuff versus Ravenclaw!" As the teams flew onto the pitch, he announced each player. Davies and Diggory shook hands (in a much friendlier manner than Wood and Flint had for the previous match) and Madam Hooch released the balls.

Harry zoomed straight up and looked around for the ever-evasive golden Snitch. As he was scanning the area, he noticed a wizard who was destined to stand out in any crowd, be it magical or mundane, with his colorful robes and long, white hair and beard. Although Harry didn't think Dumbledore was a good headmaster, and didn't always have the best judgment, he was glad to see the old wizard. He had kept Harry's identity secret, and was a powerful warlock. The Boy-Who-Lived-In-Secret was certain that the retired professor would be able to cast a powerful Patronus, should the need arise. He wondered if his aunt had invited him for that purpose as one of her precautions.

He continued to scan the pitch and noticed Cedric doing the same. The Ravenclaw Seeker flew around in a seemingly random pattern, which he felt actually allowed him to scan the pitch more efficiently. He had just glanced at his best friend when she caught the Quaffle.

"Davies passes the Quaffle to Granger," said Lee, "and she flies toward the other end of the pitch."

Harry grinned until he noticed both Hufflepuff Beaters moving into a position that would give them a clear shot at Hermione, who was seemingly oblivious to them as she avoided the opposing Chasers. Whether she was or wasn't aware of them, Harry felt he should do something to help. Without a moment's hesitation, he leaned into his broom and shot toward the ground, making sure to get between the Beaters and Hermione, thus delaying their ability to take aim.

"McGonagall shoots toward the ground! Has he seen the Snitch? Diggory flies right behind him, trying to catch up! They're both closing in on the ground. McGonagall pulls up; it was a feint! Diggory follows! Both without touching the ground." He paused for a moment before

adding, "Granger gets the first goal of the game – 10 to 0 – Ravenclaw!"

The crowd cheered. Harry grinned as he saw her do a quick loop in celebration. '*She looks so cute like that,*' he thought for a moment before shaking his head. '*I do NOT think she's cute,*' he tried to reassure himself, though even his thoughts didn't sound convinced.

The game progressed with both teams scoring about equally. Roger Davies and Sean Bradley both made more goals than Hermione, but she did get one more. About an hour into the game, Harry finally saw what he was looking for – a glint of gold right near the Ravenclaw goal hoops. Realizing that he couldn't fool Cedric twice in the same game, he simply shot at the Snitch as fast as he could make his broom go. Diggory was a bit closer than he was, but had hesitated just long enough to give Harry the advantage. He barely registered that he'd flown right past Hermione as he stuck his fist through a hoop.

"Granger gets another goal and McGonagall grabs the Snitch! The match is over! Ravenclaw wins – 250 to 110."

"Yes!" Harry shouted, pumping his fist in the air. He turned around, and seeing Hermione, he put his arms around her. She returned the hug for a moment, and when they started to separate, they found themselves face to face, with their mouths less than two inches apart. They stared into each other's eyes for an eternity that lasted about five seconds.

"I guess the best man won," came a voice, pulling the two back into reality. Harry blinked before turning to see Cedric Diggory with his hand outstretched. "You beat me fair and square, again. Congratulations."

Harry shook the opposing Captain/Seeker's hand and muttered, "Thanks," before flying toward the ground, not sparing a glance back to his best friend.

Cedric looked between the two of them for a moment. "I didn't interrupt anything, did I?" he asked with a concerned expression.

"No," Hermione answered emotionlessly. "Nothing at all." She then flew down as well.

--HP--

Unlike all the previous awkward moments between them, this time Harry and Hermione weren't able to just pretend it never happened. At the party in Ravenclaw Tower, when they saw each other, they both blushed and looked at the floor, and then went to opposite sides of the room. The next day, they continued to hang out together with Padma, but hardly spoke directly to one another. It was obvious to anyone observing them that they weren't angry with each other, but that something was wrong between them.

"What's up with you and Harry?" asked Padma. She had approached Hermione after a few days of this.

"Nothing," answered Hermione quickly.

"You're not speaking to each other," she countered.

"We sit together."

"Without saying a word to each other," replied Padma. "You won't even look at each other, and I want to know why."

Hermione sighed. "We haven't had a fight, if that's what you want to know."

"You haven't been acting right since that Quidditch game. If you didn't fight, then what happened?"

"We...nothing."

"Come on!"

Hermione's ears turned pink as she took a deep breath. "Fine. Right after Harry caught the Snitch, he hugged me."

"So?"

“So, when we started to separate, he looked in my eyes.” Her face flushed. “I think he could tell I wanted him to kiss me.”

Padma grinned. “What happened next?”

“Cedric Diggory interrupted us to congratulate Harry, and then he flew off. I think Harry is worried I think he wants to kiss me.” She sighed sadly and examined her shoes. “I know better.” Hermione looked up when she heard her best female friend begin laughing. “It’s not funny!” she said defensively.

“Yes, it is,” replied Padma. “Don’t you see? You’re one of the smartest students at Hogwarts, but you can’t understand your best friend at all.”

“What do you...”

“What has Brianna been saying about you and Harry since the day you met?”

Hermione blushed. “That we’d end up dating.”

“And what has always been Harry’s reaction to that accusation?”

Hermione looked down once more. “He’d get upset and vehemently deny it.”

“Exactly. So, how do you think he’d react if he found himself having those kinds of feelings for you?”

She looked up. “He’d deny it, try to fight his feelings.”

“Add to that the fact that he doesn’t know how you feel about him and is probably worried about ruining your friendship.”

“He’s driving himself crazy. What can I do about it?”

“You have two choices. One is that you can go after him and ask him out...”

“I can’t do that!” she said indignantly. After a few moments, she added, “Not unless the situation gets a lot more desperate.”

"Then you have to wait for him to come to terms with his feelings. Make him come to you." Padma smirked at Hermione. "Of course, you can *encourage* him along."

--HP--

The next day, Harry was waiting as usual in the common room to walk to breakfast with Hermione and Padma when they walked up the staircase from the girls' dorm. "Morning, Padma," he said cheerfully. He glanced at Hermione for a moment and said, "Hi," before looking down as his ears turned pink.

"Good morning, Harry," Hermione said enthusiastically, putting her hand on his shoulder for a moment. The blush reached his cheeks.

"Let's go to breakfast," he said quickly as he turned around and walked toward the door, not noticing the amused glance the two girls exchanged behind his back.

And so it continued that throughout the ensuing days that Hermione would occasionally put her hands on him in a manner that could be interpreted as either flirtatious or platonic, causing Harry to blush and get nervous. Fortunately, Padma had talked to Brianna, giving her a stern warning not to interfere in this in any way, shape or form, so the girl made no insinuations about them when they talked, which was usually once every day, during one of the meals. Harry felt it was important to make sure his little sister was doing alright, especially since they weren't in the same house.

--HP--

One night, Harry was alone in the common room sitting near the fireplace when someone sat down next to him.

"Hello, Harry," said a feminine voice that was familiar to him. It seemed distracted and far away, but that was just the way that girl usually sounded.

"Hello, Luna," he answered with a grin. "How are you doing?"

"The nargles have been staying away from me so far, but they often return around Christmas, when mistletoe gets hung," she replied.

"Um, I'm glad you're alright."

She looked at Harry for a few seconds before smiling as her eyes got back out of focus. "I see the grufpents are beginning to leave you."

He looked confused. "What?"

"Grufpents. Remember I told you about them last Valentine's Day. They've been stopping you from realizing how you feel about Hermione Granger."

"I, I don't," he stuttered as he looked flabbergasted.

"I see there are still a few more grufpents affecting you, but you should fight them off, otherwise you'll end up missing what you want most. Good night." She then got up and walked away, leaving Harry alone to sort out what she'd said.

--HP--

It was Saturday night, precisely one week before the next Hogsmeade trip, which took place the day before they'd go home for the Christmas holidays, and the trio was walking out of Professor LaVelle's French class. They were half way to Ravenclaw Tower when Harry cleared his throat, "Um, Hermione," he said nervously.

"Yes, Harry."

"Could we talk, um, alone?" He then glanced at their other companion. "If you don't mind, Padma."

"Oh, I don't mind," she said with a small grin. "Bye." She then walked off.

Hermione could feel a swarm of butterflies gathering in her stomach. "Er, well, what do you want to talk about?"

“Could we...step into that classroom, er, instead of standing in the middle of the hall?” he asked nervously.

“Alright,” she said, walking into the empty room he’d indicated. He joined her and closed the door.

He cleared his throat again, and was nervously moving from foot to foot while examining the floor. “Well, you see, the thing is,” he began.

“What is it?” she asked, gently placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Well, you know that next Saturday is Hogsmeade?”

“Yes,” she said, excitement building up inside her.

He looked up and gazed into her expectant eyes. “Wudugowthme?”

She blinked and forced down her laughter. She knew what he was trying to say, but was determined to make him say it. “What was that?”

He took a deep breath and carefully articulated each word as his whole face turned pink. “Would you like to go to Hogsmeade with me?”

“Oh,” she replied, deciding to get a slight bit of revenge for him making her wait so long. She purposely misunderstood. “This time you want to go with Padma and me? Shouldn’t you ask her, too?”

“I mean,” he said, now examining his shoes closely, “that I want it just to be the two of us, you know, like a...” He trailed off.

“A date?” she enquired.

He once more lifted his head and gazed into her eyes before swallowing. “Yes,” he managed.

Rather than do a happy dance like she wanted to, she gave him a slight grin. “Yes, I believe I would like to go to Hogsmeade with you.”

He grinned broadly. “Good. Great.” He asked her, “Are there any specific places you want to visit so that we can, y’know, plan it out?”

She grinned again, happy that he wanted to make sure she had a good time. "Well, last time, I didn't get to see..."

After a few minutes of discussing that, they'd planned out most of their day. Harry looked nervous again. "Um, I hope you don't mind, but, I'd kind of like to make sure that Brianna doesn't find out about it...until after." She narrowed her eyes a bit. "I just don't want her teasing us."

After a moment of contemplation, she replied, "Well, I suppose I could do without that as well. So, I guess we'll have to tell Padma, but that's it. The less people who know, the less likely it is that she'll find out, until after our date."

Both of them were grinning broadly when they got to their common room.

--HP--

Both Harry and Hermione were still in high spirits the next day when they were in Animagus practice with Padma. They had told their best friend and sworn her to secrecy until Christmas break, which began the day after their first date. Harry and Hermione weren't specifically doing anything that showed they were dating, such as holding hands, but both were smiling uncontrollably. Padma, too, was grinning.

"Well," Aunt Minnie said, "you three do look happy today. Any particular reason?"

Harry blushed while Hermione looked down. Padma simply held her smile. Harry said, "Um, we're just excited about Christmas break coming up."

"After the exams you're having this week," added Minerva, although she seemed to be looking between Harry and Hermione with a small smirk that most of the students would not have recognized. "I do hope you are studying for them."

"Of course," said Hermione, almost sounding offended. "At least two hours every weekday and six hours on weekends."

“Very well,” she replied, “Now let’s get to our lesson.”

They began by clearing their minds of all distractions, which took a bit longer than normal, and concentrating on their right index fingers. After about an hour, they began having their first measurable progress since they began this process.

“I’ve done it!” exclaimed Hermione. Everyone looked and saw that her finger had a dark brown fur on it, and her fingernail had grown into a claw. Within just a few seconds, it returned to normal. Hermione frowned.

“Excellent,” said Minerva encouragingly. “You’re making good progress.”

Over the next hour, Hermione had been able to get those results once more, while Harry and Padma were able to change their fingers once – both to a claw with black fur. Everyone in the room realized that Harry’s black fur matched his true hair color instead of the dirty brown it had been changed to, but no one commented on it.

“You’ve all made remarkable progress,” Minerva said at the end of the lesson, “and should be very proud. Now, I’ve got a lot of parchmentwork to do, and I’m sure you don’t want to spend all day with an old woman...”

“Aunt Minnie,” protested Harry.

“Now, run along and enjoy the day.”

“Bye, Aunt Minnie,” he said before quickly hugging her.

“I’ll see you later,” she said with a grin. Just as they were leaving, she added, “Harry and Hermione, do enjoy yourselves in Hogsmeade.”

--HP--

At long last, the long-awaited Hogsmeade weekend arrived. The trio was sitting at breakfast, with both Harry and Hermione barely touching their plates as they nervously stared at the table. Harry was

wearing his bottomless backpack so that he could easily carry anything they purchased.

“So, Padma,” said Harry, “You’ll be alright once we separate?”

“Yeah,” she replied. “I’ll catch up with Parv and Lav.”

“Good,” said Hermione. “I’d hate for you to...”

“Good morning!” came a voice from behind them that Harry would recognize anywhere.

“Hi, Brianna,” he said, unenthusiastically. He truly hoped she didn’t know he was going to Hogsmeade alone with Hermione.

“I’ve got another shopping list,” his sister said as she held out a piece of parchment with a list that consisted mostly of Honeydukes products, along with a few items from Zonko’s.

“Do you have the money?” he asked.

“I was hoping you’d forget that,” she said with a grin as she reached into her pocket and pulled out a sack of coins and handed them over.

“Fine, I’ll see you tonight. Don’t get caught breaking rules.”

She feigned being offended. “How could you even suggest such a thing? I never *get caught* breaking the rules.”

“See that it stays that way, sis. Bye.”

Once Brianna was out of earshot, Harry asked, “Padma, could you do me a big favor and pick up this stuff? I really don’t want to think about Brianna today.”

Giggling, Padma answered, “Sure, Harry. I hope you and Hermione have a wonderful time.”

It was less than half an hour later that Harry and Hermione parted ways with Padma, to begin their first date.

They began walking side-by-side without touching or saying a word. Harry finally broke the silence after a few minutes. "Well, I suppose we should visit Honeydukes first. Um, pick out whatever you want and I'll..."

"Harry," she interrupted, "I think we're both too nervous and need to calm down before doing anything else."

He shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "You're right. It's just; I want this to go right and..."

"Me, too. Why don't we find someplace private to sit down and talk?"

"Good idea. Let's go near the Shrieking Shack and find a spot to sit down."

A few minutes later, Harry pulled a picnic blanket out and laid it on the ground for them to sit.

"You really came prepared," Hermione commented with a smirk.

Harry's ears turned pink. "Well, I sort of wanted everything to be perfect, y'know."

"I know," she said, putting her hand on his. "I want this to be perfect, too." She sighed. "I really like you, Harry."

He couldn't help the huge grin that formed on his face. "You do?" She nodded. "That's good because..." He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. "I really, really like you, too." He sighed again, not noticing the smile on his date's face. "It's just, I've always told Brianna that I didn't, and now she'll be proven right and..." He trailed off when he finally looked at her face. "You have such a pretty smile," he said before he could stop himself. She blushed.

"I don't," she argued. "My teeth..."

"When you smile," he interrupted, looking her straight in the eyes, "your whole face lights up, even your eyes, and anyone who sees that has no choice but to smile, too." He now blushed. "Um, and you look really cute that way."

"Thanks, Harry," she said while her face was still red.

"For several months I've been thinking about you more and more...like that...and been trying to act like I haven't." He took a deep breath. "Anyway, I realized that I'm making myself a lot more miserable than Brianna by pretending I don't have feelings for you, so I plucked up the courage and asked you to be my date so I could find out how you feel."

She managed to look him in the eyes. "I'm glad you did, Harry, because I feel the same way."

He paused for a moment before asking, "Do you want to move a bit closer?"

"Um hm," she mumbled as they both crawled closer together on the blanket until they were face-to-face.

He swallowed nervously. "The last time we were this close..."

"This isn't last time, Harry," she interrupted softly.

He tilted his face and moved it toward hers while she did the same thing while closing her eyes. Luckily, he hadn't closed his because they would've bumped noses. He gently put his hand under her chin as he'd seen his dad do a few times with his mom and their lips met.

That first kiss lasted only a few seconds, but it seemed like a lot longer as Harry experienced sensations he'd never imagined before. He knew he'd wanted to kiss Hermione, but didn't know he'd feel this way. He knew he'd never be able to describe his first kiss, but he'd always remember it.

When they broke apart, both teenagers had a dazed expression on their faces. "Wow," he said at the same time she muttered the same word. They looked into each other's eyes for a moment, each seeking permission from the other, and their lips met once more.

About a minute later, a drawling voice caused them to break apart and draw their wands as they stood up.

“Two little mudbloods sitting in a tree...”

“Shut up, Malfoy,” yelled Harry. Draco was, as always, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle, who were snickering at his joke.

“I suppose you’re not technically a mudblood, just the son of a squib, but if you’re kissing a mudblood it’s no different.”

Harry’s expression darkened and he spoke very calmly. “It’s none of your business, anyway, so get out of here before you get hurt.”

Malfoy looked afraid for a moment, but glanced at his bodyguards and sneered, “Unless your stupid *care* organization is hiding here, you’re outnumbered.”

“Maybe you three should form an organization of your own, Malfoy. You could call yourselves the *Community of Revolting, Annoying Prats*, CRAP for short, or better yet, the *Society of Helpless, Irritating Troublemakers*.”

“Harry!” interrupted Hermione, “Let’s get our stuff and go.”

“Oh, no you don’t!” said Malfoy. “I like that blanket.” He then stepped on it to prevent them from taking it.

“*Accio*, shoe,” Harry quickly muttered, causing Draco’s foot to come up. Harry quickly released the spell, causing him to fall on his rear.

“*Petrificus Totalus!*” yelled Hermione putting Crabbe in the full body-bind.

While Hermione did the same thing to Goyle, who was still reaching for his wand, Harry performed a hex on Draco that made everything between his waist and his knees extremely itchy. While Malfoy was scratching, Harry grabbed the blanket and held out his hand for Hermione to take. “Just remember, Malfoy, if you try to get us in trouble, I’ll show the headmistress my memory of this. I’m sure you remember her punishment for using that stupid M-word you love so much.” Hand-in-hand, the new couple walked off, laughing at the plight of the Slytherins.

--HP--

The rest of the day went very well as the new couple went from shop to shop holding hands. They stopped at a few other places to *practice* their newly acquired kissing skills, and both were positively beaming with happiness by the time they arrived in the Great Hall. Padma was the first to notice their intertwined hands as they entered the room, and she looked ecstatic. The second person was Harry's sister, who took one look at their joined hands, smiled and said, "I knew it!"

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

You may recall that in PoA, the first match was supposed to be Gryffindor versus Slytherin, but due to Draco's terribly painful fake injury, the Slytherins were able to switch games with the Hufflepuffs. In this story, Hagrid's not the CoMC teacher and didn't introduce the class to hippogriffs, which left the snakes with no excuse not to play in the foul weather.

Harry McGonagall – Chapter 27 – An Unremarkable Christmas

Harry and Hermione managed to eat dinner in peace after they got Brianna to go to her table. Padma was sitting there beaming but didn't say a word about their new relationship. There were a few people who pointed at Harry and Hermione and whispered, but not that many. It would've been a lot more if one of them were famous. Once the new couple was finished, they got up and walked hand-in-hand to the Ravenclaw common room, where Brianna wasn't allowed. They were sitting together in front of the fireplace when Padma caught up with them.

"I take it things went well," she said, "judging by how close you two are sitting."

"You could say that," replied Harry, trying to sound nonchalant, although the big goofy grin on his face was ruining his act.

"We are officially dating," added Hermione happily.

"I'm so happy for you," said Padma. She leaned in a bit closer to the couple. "So, have you two kissed?" The tomato-red faces on her two best friends was all the answer she needed. "You have!" she declared while they tried to hide their faces. "So, how was it?"

"Brilliant," muttered Harry without looking up. Hermione nodded in agreement.

--HP--

The next day, Harry and Hermione managed to get through breakfast at the Ravenclaw table without any teasing, but Harry could tell by looking at his sister's face (she was facing them from the Gryffindor table) that she was saving it for later. As usual, the McGonagalls wouldn't be riding the Express, instead apparating to the airport to floo to America. Also as usual, they rode the thestral-drawn carriages with other students. This time, however, Aunt Minnie rode with Brianna and her friends in the carriage ahead of Harry, who rode with Padma and Hermione.

"Well, guys, I hope you like my gifts."

"I'm sure we will, Harry," said Hermione.

"I'll bet Hermione gets a better gift than me," Padma fake-pouted. "I'm just your friend, not your kissing partner."

Both of her companions were now blushing madly, but Harry managed to say, "This doesn't bother you, does it Padma? I don't want you to feel..." He trailed off, unsure how to phrase what he was thinking.

"I was just kidding," Padma replied. "Honest. I'm very happy for both of you."

"Good," said Hermione, looking like she was thinking hard. "Now, we've just got to find you a boyfriend next term. What do you think of Michael?"

--HP--

The trio was still discussing possible boyfriends for Padma when they arrived at Hogsmeade. As Harry was helping Hermione off the carriage, a familiar voice called out, "It's about time. I thought your carriage would never get here. You are being a good *boyfriend*, though."

"I'm glad you approve, Brianna," Harry said.

"So, Hermione. How bad a kisser is my brother?"

The girl in question was blushing when Minerva spoke up. "Brianna! One doesn't ask that kind of question." She turned to Hermione and Padma. "Would you keep an eye on Brianna until I get back? I'm going to apparate Harry to the airport first and come back. I'm not comfortable apparating two passengers."

"Don't forget to let the new couple kiss each other goodbye," suggested Brianna, yet again embarrassing the new couple.

Sighing, Harry did go up to Hermione and hug her tightly. "You don't really want to kiss for that audience, do you?" he whispered in her ear.

"No," she agreed, "but I would if we were alone."

"I know. I'll miss you, despite our mirror calls."

"So will I."

When they separated, Harry gave his girlfriend a peck on the cheek, which she happily returned.

"That's not how you do it, Harry," complained Brianna. "Your lips have to meet."

"Not in front of annoying baby sisters."

Deciding to end the argument, Minerva put an arm around her nephew and they disappeared with a crack as Harry said, "Bye, Padma." After instructing Harry to not go anywhere, she left and returned about a minute later with his sister. They went to the magical part of the airport, paid for tickets, got in line and floored to Chicago.

--HP--

"Harry!" exclaimed Cindy McGonagall as she wrapped her arms around her son. "I missed you!" At the same time, Mark was hugging his daughter.

"I missed you, too, mum," he replied.

"I see you've been developing your British accent," she said with a grin.

"Huh?" he asked, puzzled.

"You called me *mum* instead of *mom*," she explained.

"Oh." With a grin, he added, "Happy Christmas," with a strong British accent.

"Merry Christmas, son."

"Merry Christmas, dad. It's great to see you." Harry hugged his father.

“What’s this Brianna told me about you dating Hermione now?”

--HP--

During the car ride home, Harry had to work hard to keep shifting the conversation away from his new *relationship* with Hermione by talking about lessons, Quidditch and anything else he could think of. However, his annoying little brat of a sister kept bringing the conversation back to that topic.

“I saw you two after that Hufflepuff game,” she said while he was describing Ravenclaw’s recent victory. “I could tell you would’ve kissed right there in front of everybody if that ‘Puff captain hadn’t interrupted you.”

“He was congratulating me,” grumbled Harry. “You know, Cedric Diggory really is a good Seeker, as well as captain. Do you remember when he...” Harry mentioned everything he could think of about the Hufflepuff captain to keep the focus off of him and Hermione. As was their custom, they stopped at a restaurant before going home.

--HP--

“Hey, Harry, do you mind if we talk?” Harry looked up from his bed, where he’d been lying while playing his Game Boy. He paused it as his father closed the door.

“What about, dad?”

Mark McGonagall appeared nervous as he sat down on the chair at Harry’s desk. “Well, I certainly understand you not wanting Brianna teasing you about Hermione, but, um, I thought maybe I should, well, talk with you about...that sort of stuff. Y’know, girls.”

Sighing, Harry said, “I knew this would happen sooner or later.” With amazing speed, Harry got his wand from its holster, pointed it at the door and said, “*Silencio!*” while his dad watched in amazement.

“You do that pretty well,” Mark commented. “I assume that’s to make sure Brianna isn’t eavesdropping.” Harry nodded with a grin. After

clearing his throat, Mark continued. "Well, you're at the age now where..."

Although Harry was embarrassed during most of 'the talk,' he did learn a lot from his father, but would never talk about it until he had a son of his own. Although he'd never admit it on pain of death, he was glad they'd had that conversation.

--HP--

The next day, Harry got to see his American friends and play at Frank's Flying Funhouse with them. Before Harry had finished greeting his old friends, Brianna told them that he was now dating Hermione. He took a bit of teasing from them, but on the whole they were happy for him, and most of them were dating as well. His friend Melissa reminded him that Brianna had told them he and Hermione were dating over one and a half years before.

He played two games of Quidditch with them (winning both by catching the Snitch), but decided against playing Quadpot when it was brought up. He hadn't really enjoyed it the previous summer and doubted he'd like it any better now.

--HP--

Christmas day was, as usual, a happy affair in the McGonagall household. The day started for Harry with a pleasant dream about Hermione that involved mistletoe. In his dream, they were standing under the festive plant and Hermione was dressed in a sexy version of a Mrs. Claus costume. They were about to kiss when she stopped and looked at him.

She looked concerned when she said, "Harry. Harry!"

He opened his eyes and saw he was alone in his room, but Hermione's voice continued to yell, "Harry!" He blinked twice and then realized what was going on. His girlfriend was doing the same thing she'd done last year.

He picked up his mirror from his desk and said, "Merry Christmas, Hermione."

She grinned at him. "There you are. Happy Christmas! I wanted to be the first to wish you that today."

Stifling a yawn, Harry nodded. "You were. Did you like my gift?"

"Absolutely!" she said, fingering a small golden heart hanging from her neck. "I love the necklace. I just don't know when you got it."

Grinning, he replied, "A magician never reveals his secrets. Did you like the pictures I chose?"

"Mm hmm," she replied, smiling. She opened the heart to show that a picture of each of them that had been taken during the summer. Although the image in the mirror was too small for Harry to see, their photographic doubles were blowing kisses at each other.

"Good."

"I just hope you like my present as much as I like yours."

"I'm sure I will."

At that point, they were interrupted by a loud knock on the door. Brianna's voice came through the door. "Harry, stop talking to your girlfriend and get out here. There are presents to open up!"

Harry turned back to his mirror. "I suppose I'd better go. She'll never stop knocking."

"That's right, lover-boy," Brianna yelled, "so kiss the mirror and come downstairs."

"I'll talk to you later, Hermione."

"Happy Christmas, again."

"Happy Christmas. Mirror off."

Harry went down to the living room and found the rest of his family waiting for him. "Merry Christmas, everybody."

“Happy Christmas, Harry,” said Aunt Minnie, while the others wished him a merry Christmas.

They soon began opening presents. Both Harry and Brianna got new winter coats, along with other clothes. They also got some new cds. Harry got a few video games, while Brianna got her own Game Boy (along with a few games of her own). From Hermione, Harry got a bottle of cologne that had a note saying it was her favorite. He took off the cap and did like it, but decided to only wear it on special occasions.

“You mean you’ll only wear it when you’re with Hermione,” said Brianna with a wink.

“That is getting rather old, Brianna,” replied Harry, who by this time had been teased so much that he wasn’t blushing anymore. She frowned for a moment and then opened another one of her presents.

This year, Harry didn’t get any mysterious present like he’d gotten last year, but he thought he did alright. They ate breakfast and then Harry went back to his room, where he called Hermione on his mirror and thanked her for the cologne and discussed how to get revenge on Brianna for her constant teasing.

--HP--

The plan that Harry and Hermione came up with would unfortunately have to wait until they were back at school, but Hermione was able to get started on the potion part of it right away. Not having anything else to do, Harry went downstairs and played on his Super Nintendo.

While Brianna continued teasing Harry unsuccessfully, he continued imagining what was in store for her once they returned to school. Harry was able to hang out with his American friends one more time and go to a muggle movie with them. On New Year’s Eve, the family stayed up until midnight. Harry had called Hermione when it was about midnight her time so they were communicating and she called him just before it turned midnight his time. Brianna once again suggested them kissing the mirrors, much to the young couple’s irritation.

--HP--

The next day, the Hogwarts Express returned to Hogwarts, as did Harry, Brianna and Minerva. They arrived a few hours before the other students and occupied themselves while waiting for the others to come into the Great Hall. Harry went to the library while Brianna went off somewhere else – he guessed it was Gryffindor Tower.

The siblings were both in the Great Hall (sitting at their house tables) when the others arrived. A huge grin came on Harry's face when Hermione walked into the room. He stood up as she approached the table, all the while looking in her eyes. At that moment, nothing else existed in the world besides his girlfriend. When she was close enough, he put his arms around her, said, "I've missed you," and kissed her.

--HP--

Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I apologize for this chapter being so short. There are two reasons for this. One is that I didn't have much planned for the Christmas break and the other is that I'm going on a trip for over a week, leaving tomorrow, and I'm not bringing my computer. Therefore, you'd have had to wait another two weeks for me to add more material to the chapter.